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A Girl's Heart.

BY RETT WINWOOD.

CHAPTER I.

A SUMMER NIGHT'S REVELATION.

WHAT a hot, stirless night it was! Not a breath of air fluttered in the tree-tops, or lingered to wanton with the languid heart's-ease and yellow daffodils hiding away in the dark recesses of the garden below. The heat was fearfully intense. It stifled and oppressed one with its fervor.

Rachel Clyde felt the languor of the night as she sat gasping at the open window of her little bedroom. There was no light in the room save the silvery radiance of the moonbeams. She sat quite alone in the purplish dusk—alone with her own unpleasant thoughts.

She felt strangely nervous and distraught; once or twice she shivered without knowing why.

"Is anybody walking over my grave, I wonder?" she murmured, and then laughed at her own foolish fancies.

It was already quite late. The house had been quiet for more than an hour. But Rachel could not sleep. I don't know which was most at fault, the oppressive heat, or her own distressful thoughts.

At last she arose. The close air of the room she could endure no longer. Throwing a light scarf over her head she glided noiselessly from the apartment, and slowly descended the stairs, pausing at nearly every step to listen.

"Madame Gale must not hear me," she said, to herself, with a little grimace. "She does not approve of night rambles. I should be sure of a lecture."

So she groped her way onward, very carefully. A glass door opened upon a terrace at

one end of the halls. The key always hung on a hook close by—and this key Rachel intended to confiscate and let herself out with it.

The darkness was quite intense in this part of the hall, for the glass door was thickly shaded with vines. But the girl knew the way perfectly, and almost at the first trial she found the hook where the key usually hung.

But the hook was empty; the key was gone!

Rachel gave a quick start as she made this discovery. She groped for the door-handle. It turned easily. The key was in the lock!

She could draw but one inference from this fact—for Madame Gale was very particular about securing the doors at night. Somebody must have gone out before her.

Who was it—Madame Gale herself, or one of the servants?

Rachel stood quite still for a moment, puzzled and at a loss. Should she go on and run the risk of being discovered?



SHE FLUNG BOTH ARMS ABOUT HIS NECK AND CLUNG THERE, SOBBING ON HIS BREAST AS IF HER HEART WOULD BREAK.

The grounds looked dark and cool and pleasant. Rachel could not withstand the temptation to hide herself in their odorous recesses. She stepped across the terrace, and ran swiftly down the steps into the garden.

The moonlight would have betrayed her had she lingered near the house. Therefore she darted into the nearest shrubbery and fled in its shadow to a more remote portion of the grounds.

The strange, solemn hush of night reigned everywhere. Above swung a purple arch of stars, calm, peaceful, serene. The young moon hung, a silver crescent, in the western heaven. The garden seemed like the evergreen court of some enchanted land.

Flitting up and down in the profound gloom of the syringas and lime-trees, Rachel's thoughts naturally turned into their former channel. The mystery that shrouded her early life affected her more powerfully than usual this night. Why was it? Was fate about to prove itself kind at last, and open some of its mystic pages?

Her history was a peculiar one. She knew nothing of her parents—not even if she had a right to the name she bore. She had lived with Madame Gale ever since she could remember. At first her brother Richard had been with her, and made the sum of her happiness.

Richard was her twin-brother, and she loved him fondly. But a terrible grief had crept into the lives of these two, and now they were separated. Rachel did not even know where her brother might be wandering. Sometimes she feared he was lost to her forever.

It is not strange that her thoughts were bitter ones as she wandered up and down the shadowy walks under the summer stars.

Presently a foot stopped on the gravel path. Rachel heard it, thought suddenly of the unbolted doors, and crouched low in the odorous gloom of tangled roses and rhododendrons growing close at hand.

Not an instant too soon. Two figures turned a sudden bend in the path, and came straight toward her hiding-place.

One was Madame Gale. Rachel recognized her instantly, despite the thin shawl madame had taken the precaution to throw over her head.

Her companion was a lady very richly dressed. Rachel could not see her face distinctly, for she wore a veil, dusky as was the night. But her silk gown rustled along the walk as she advanced.

Rachel lay low in her hiding-place quite breathless. She was now too frightened to stir. Even the cracking of a twig under her foot would have betrayed her.

She vaguely wondered what Madame Gale could be doing here so late, and why this strange lady was with her. Even as the thought passed through her mind, a voice low and singularly sweet broke the silence.

"Have you nothing to propose, Agnes?"

"Nothing, Pauline."

It was Madame Gale who answered. She spoke harshly, almost angrily.

"You are cruel," cried the strange lady, petulantly. "You see my trouble, and yet will not lift your finger to help me out of it."

"How can I? You made the trouble for yourself."

Every word reached Rachel's ears distinctly. To her grief and horror, the two women suddenly halted so close to her hiding-place that she might have touched their garments.

"I have sacrificed enough for you already," Madame Gale went on, in a hard voice. "More than enough, when I think how ungrateful you have shown yourself."

"You have never wanted for money."

"Money? Bah! As if money made up the sum and substance of earthly happiness!"

"I will do anything you ask of me, Agnes, only you must promise to keep that girl out of the way."

"Rachel Clyde?"

"Yes, Rachel."

"Have I not done so all these years? Has she ever troubled you?"

"Never," moving uneasily, and drawing a deep breath. "But at this moment the danger is tenfold greater than it ever was before. I'm heart-sick, Agnes. My mind is heavy with foreboding."

Madame Gale turned, angrily.

"You were a fool for coming here, Pauline. Do you think I can keep the lion from biting you if you will run into its jaws?"

"I did not wish to come. I thought you understood that. It was my husband's doings. He took a sudden fancy to this neighborhood. I remonstrated as long as I dared; but all in vain. Of course I could not let him come alone."

"I should say not."

"I see but one way out of our difficulty. Rachel must go. I shall not draw a free breath while she remains."

"Send Rachel away?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

There was a moment's silence. Madame Gale seemed to quiver with some suppressed emotion. When she spoke again her voice was not quite steady.

"Pauline, I have learned to love that girl," she said. "If you mean any harm to her you might as well give up your purpose first as last."

"Harm!" echoed the strange lady, scornfully.

"Don't be a fool, Agnes."

"What is your purpose?"

"Rachel has been well educated. Find her a situation to teach in some remote place. You might do it."

"Yes."

"Will you?"

"I don't know," hesitatingly. "I have grown used to her, and dislike to give her up. Is there no other way?"

"None. You can see for yourself what a risk we run while she remains."

"Yes, yes."

"Besides, that precious scamp, Dick, might come back at any moment. And then we would have two ghosts instead of one to murder our rest."

"That isn't likely. Dick wouldn't dare come back, just yet."

"True."

"And Rachel is such an innocent child she would never work ill to anybody."

"Bah!" sneered the strange lady; "I am not so sure of that."

Then, with a sudden change of tone, she added:

"I must see the girl. I have not looked upon her face for years, you remember. Strange, isn't it, that I should never have had the courage to seek a meeting?"

"Not strange to me," answered Madame Gale, abruptly.

There was another silence. Then the strange lady turned, awfully.

"I'm going back, Agnes," she said, with a shiver. "Ugh! The garden seems to be haunted to-night. I can't stay here; it's under an evil spell."

She forced a strange, hard laugh, as she spoke, and began to move away. Madame Gale turned, without a word, and followed her.

Rachel waited until the last echo of their footsteps had died in the distance. Then she rose, flushed and frightened.

What did it all mean? Who was this strange lady, who seemed to know so much of her, and had such good cause to be afraid of her. Why was she afraid?

Rachel stood breathless and palpitating. Oh, how she had longed and prayed to have the secret of her parentage revealed to her! To-night, at last, she knew she had stood on the verge of a great discovery. Could she let the golden opportunity slip away from her forever?

No, no! Rousing herself, she fled wildly along the path by which the two ladies had just disappeared. She meant to throw herself

at their feet, and conjure them to tell her everything.

Her mother! They might have known her mother! Rachel grew almost delirious at the thought. One word—one little word of that sainted being would have been such a comfort to her!

Suddenly a man's figure confronted her in her mad flight, as if it had risen from the bowels of the earth.

She stopped short, her heart beating fearfully loud and fast. She felt curious eyes fixed upon her face.

"Good-evening, Miss Clyde," said a cool, musical voice.

Rachel gave a start of surprise.

"Dr. Tremaine!" she cried sharply.

"I think this is a mutual surprise, Miss Clyde."

Her face flushed purple. She felt glad the moon was no brighter. Dropping her eyes, she said, in a very low voice:

"I did not expect to meet anybody in the grounds at this hour."

He laughed, and looked at her more fixedly than ever.

"No doubt," he answered. "I must confess to being an interloper. But the gates stood open, and I could not resist the impulse to trespass."

"I am sure Madame Gale would have made you welcome."

"Madame Gale has other friends to entertain at the present moment, I believe."

Rachel gave him a swift glance. Did he know? Had he heard anything?

"Other friends?" she echoed.

He laughed again, and shrugged his shoulders, whimsically. Rachel was sure she saw his face change in the moonlight.

"*Nil importe*," he muttered with a careless laugh. "Madame's friends are nothing to me. Why should I concern myself about them?"

Then, clasping the girl's hand suddenly in his own:

"But I fear I am detaining you, Miss Clyde. These night damps are not good for one. You will have no roses in your cheeks to-morrow. *Au revoir!*"

He swung on his heel and strode away in the darkness. Left alone Rachel drew a long, shivering breath of disappointment, and fled precipitately toward the house.

Two stately figures still lingered by the garden-gate. Madame Gale's strange visitor had not taken her departure.

Rachel fled past them noiselessly as a spirit. The glass door opening upon the terrace stood slightly ajar, just as she had left it.

She stole into the passage, and crept like a wraith up to her close little chamber under the roof. Once there she threw herself on the couch, and gave way to a passionate fit of weeping.

"Oh, my mother!" she moaned. "Am I to live and grow old and die, never knowing more of you than I do at this moment? Am I never to realize a mother's love? If so, God give me strength to bear the disappointment."

Such had been the burden of her plaint for more nights than one. But it had never been so passionately earnest as now.

CHAPTER II.

THE UNHORSED RIDER.

RACHEL was paler than her wont the next morning. Even Madame Gale remarked it.

"I'm afraid you are not well, my dear," she said, speaking in a very gentle tone.

Rachel was sipping her coffee rather languidly at the time, but she did not raise her eyes.

"Thank you," she answered; "I believe I am as well as usual."

"Then you must have passed a bad night."

Madame saw the girl start and shiver. She was a shrewd woman of the world—was Madame Gale. Human nature presented very few problems that she could not solve. Her scrutiny extended even to trifles. Rachel's

show of emotion was not lost upon her by any means.

"You are eating nothing," she said, sharply, after a moment's thinking. "Put on your bonnet and come with me for a walk. You need the fresh air."

Rachel silently complied. Madame did not take the public promenade, as was her habit, but turned into a shady green lane that seemed deserted.

She walked on in utter silence. Rachel stole a swift glance into her face every now and then. Madame was always a stern-looking woman, but now her countenance seemed colder and more forbidding than usual.

Rachel's heart sunk.

"She is going to tell me I must leave here," she thought. "And if I go I shall never know anything more of my own early history. There will be nobody to tell me."

Impelled by this fear, she suddenly caught Madame Gale's hand and clasped it eagerly in her own.

"Oh, madame," she cried, "you might make me so very happy, if you would! I think I have a right to know! You will not be cruel and refuse to tell me?"

Madame Gale drew back, frowning darkly.

"Silly child," she said, snatching away her hand, "you are hysterical. I don't know what you mean."

"You *do* know!" screamed Rachel, almost beside herself. "I can see it in your face. I want you to tell me of my mother."

"Your mother?" she echoed. Then she bit her lip and laughed—a short, sarcastic laugh very disagreeable to hear.

"Hush, child. Do not question me. It would not make you happier to hear about your mother."

"Did you know her?"

Madame nodded.

"And my father? Of course you must have known him, too! Oh, Madame Gale, dear Madame Gale, please tell me all about them."

"Bah!" cried the woman, angrily. "Be silent, won't you? If there was anything you ought to hear I should have told you long ago."

She shook off Rachel's clinging hand and hurried onward. But her lips were white, and not easy of control. Less than a yard away she came to a sudden standstill.

She had heard the thunderous thud of hoof-beats on the hard ground, and a shrill cry of terror. Looking back she caught a glimpse of a horse and rider, tearing like mad down the lane directly toward her.

One quick glance told her that it was a runaway. She sprang to Rachel's side, crying out sharply.

On tore the maddened beast, snorting wildly, and flecking its beautiful sides with foam. The bridle swung loosely, dragging through the dew-wet grass of the lane, and a poor helpless figure clung desperately to the frantic creature's back.

Of a sudden the horse gave a mad bound, and shot like a flash past the two frightened women, but he had left his rider lying in the hedge-row behind him—stunned, bruised, bleeding—possibly dead!

Rachel rushed forward. She was calmer and stronger than Madame Gale in this sudden emergency. She tore aside the thick foliage of the hedge, and stooped over the body of the man.

He lay perfectly still, exactly as he had fallen. Madame caught a glimpse of the prostrate figure and screamed, wildly:

"He is dead!"

Rachel swung sharply around.

"Water!" she said, in a stern, low voice. "Be quick! There's a house among those trees yonder."

Madame stood panting a moment, drew a quick breath, and fled in the direction indicated.

Rachel lifted the senseless man's head in her arms. She rested it gently against her shoulder and began to chafe the cold brow with her hand.

It was a handsome, high-bred face she looked upon. The features were delicately, almost sharply-cut, but the glossy hair clustering so thickly about the white temples was well sprinkled with gray.

Rachel experienced a strange, indefinable thrill as she gazed upon that handsome countenance. It wore a weary, listless expression, even in unconsciousness, that appealed strongly to her feelings. She felt drawn to the man by some powerful but subtle fascination—whether of good or evil she could not have told.

At last he moved, moaned, and opened his eyes with a wild stare.

"Where am I?" he asked, faintly.

"You were thrown from your horse, sir. I feared you might be seriously injured."

"Ah, yes. I remember, now."

He passed his hand over his brow. Then, after a moment's silence, he looked into the girl's sweet face curiously.

"You are very kind," he said, forcing a smile. "I'm afraid I have made you a good deal of trouble."

"No, no," she cried, eagerly. "I only hope you are not much hurt."

"A little bewildered," he answered.

He shook himself, made an effort to rise, but fell back groaning.

"It's worse than I thought, my sweet little friend. I will be compelled to trouble you still further."

"I will go for help!" cried Rachel, seeing how white he grew.

"Not yet."

Rachel looked anxiously around, very much frightened. Footsteps sounded near, and to her infinite relief she saw Madame Gale rapidly approaching with the water, which she brought in a tin dipper that had hung by the well.

Madame stopped short when she caught the first glimpse of the face which had been turned from her when she had first peered into the shrubbery at him. She stopped short, and every vestige of color fled from her face, leaving it frightfully pale.

"Colonel Heathcliff!" she stammered.

He stared hard at madame, and muttered a low exclamation.

"This is a surprise," he said, holding out his hand.

Madame Gale did not take it. Her knees knocked together. She crouched on the grass, staring pitifully at the man's handsome face, and began to wring her hands.

He looked puzzled. "I am not a ghost, Madame Gale," he said, trying to speak lightly. "Why do you glare at me like that?"

The wretched woman murmured some apology. She arose, and stepped close to his side, moving slowly and with difficulty. Her face was still very pale.

"I have brought you water, Colonel Heathcliff," she said, holding the tin dipper to his lips.

He drank eagerly, then pushed the tin away.

"You are the last person I expected to see here, Madame Gale."

"I live here," she answered, briefly.

"Indeed! I am sure my wife will be delighted to hear it."

Madame started, flushed a little, and answered:

"Mrs. Heathcliff knows it already." Then, bending nearer, she added, abruptly:

"Are you very much hurt?"

"I don't know," moaning in spite of himself. "That vicious brute did his best to kill me."

"How did it happen?"

"It was some children at play in the lane that frightened the horse, I believe. I was riding very carelessly. At the first bound he gave, the reins were jerked from my hands. Of course I had no control over him afterward."

Madame drew back a little. She was doing her best to appear calm and merely sympathetic. But she looked like a ghost.

"Rachel," she said, sharply, "you must go

for help. You and I can do nothing alone. Fetch a carriage and two or three men to help us. Let somebody go for the doctor."

"Yes, madame."

Rachel arose, heaving a long-drawn sigh. She was still under the spell of the stranger's wonderful eyes, so full of soft languor and listlessness. He had just such eyes, such a face, and such a high-bred air as women always rave over.

There must have been a magnetic sympathy between the two, for Colonel Heathcliff raised himself on his elbow, and watched the girl as she tripped lightly away. When she was quite gone from his sight, he fell back, groaning dismally.

"I'm badly hurt," he said. "But I did not wish to frighten that poor child. You won't mind my wailings, Madame Gale?"

He forced a very faint smile to his ashy lips. Madame could not answer. She looked dreadfully scared, and tempted to run away.

After two or three contortions, Colonel Heathcliff seemed to breathe more easily. He wiped the cold damps from his forehead, and said, quite composedly:

"Madame Gale, that girl has interested me. Who is she?"

Madame bit her lip. After a moment's thinking, she answered:

"My adopted daughter, Rachel Clyde."

He gave a slight start.

"What a creature of mysteries you are!" he exclaimed. "The adoption must have been recent. I never heard of her before."

"No," returned madame, "it was *not* recent."

Then she turned away her face. She would say no more.

CHAPTER III.

PARLOR APPARITION.

A LONG interval passed. Madame Gale stood beside the wounded man, very pale and stern-looking, but never once remitting the little attentions that were his due.

She seemed strangely restless and ill at ease, however. After the few laconic sentences already recorded, she scarcely spoke to Colonel Heathcliff until Rachel made her appearance, followed by three or four men.

Then she stepped quickly forward to meet them.

"Did you order a carriage, Rachel?" she asked, eagerly.

One of the men made answer:

"The carriage will be here in two minutes, madame. This young lady has executed her commission well."

He spoke respectfully, and in the low tone of a person of some refinement. The words had scarcely left his lips, however, when the carriage itself dashed into view, turning the nearest curve in the lane, and finally drawing up at a little distance.

The sight seemed to restore Madame Gale's animation. The color came back to her face, the light to her eyes. She called the men to her aid, and Colonel Heathcliff was lifted up gently and borne to the carriage.

Rachel followed, watching him with great, wide-open eyes, full of sympathy. It was singular—the interest with which this listless, world-weary man had inspired her! He seemed near to her, somehow, as if they were friends already.

Madame must have read something of all this in the girl's face when she turned, presently, from the task of arranging Colonel Heathcliff comfortably in the carriage, for she caught Rachel's hand and whispered, sharply:

"Come away, child. You can do no more."

She tried to drag the child out of sight. Colonel Heathcliff suspected her purpose, and defeated it. Despite the pain he was in, he looked round quickly and called to her.

"Madame Gale," he pleaded, "let Miss Clyde go with me to Fairlawn."

Madame recoiled a little, caught her breath sharply, and answered:

"Oh, no, no! Not there! Rachel cannot go there!"

She looked so pale and shocked and frightened that Colonel Heathcliff could not resist the impulse to say, with a suspicious lifting of his eyebrows:

"And why not, pray?"

The tone—not the question—brought madame to her senses again. She bit her lip viciously.

"Forgive me," she murmured, after a brief pause. "This accident has strangely frustrated me. I hardly know what I say or do. Of course Rachel can accompany you, if you wish it."

"I do wish it, very much."

Madame bowed. She was smiling her best. But she looked ghastly.

"We will both go," she said. "Indeed, it is no more than right. I could not forgive myself, Colonel Heathcliff, for deserting you before becoming aware of the extent of the injuries you have sustained."

The colonel's lip curled.

"You are very kind," he murmured, and with a very expressive glance signed for Rachel to take her place beside him.

She did so, her heart beating very fast and loud. Madame followed her into the carriage, after having given a few hurried words of direction to the driver. A moment later they were *en route*.

It was a ride Rachel never forgot. She sat between Colonel Heathcliff and madame. The colonel's handsome blue eyes with their dreamy languor scarcely once left her face, but seemed to linger there half greedily, as though he was tasting some forbidden pleasure—mayhap recalling some vanished dream.

Madame sat up very stiff and grim. She did not look at either of the two, but straight before her. Every now and then the muscles about her firm mouth contracted with either fear or pain.

Scarcely a word was spoken. The carriage rolled cityward. Not far, however. Rachel heard a great gate swung open, presently, and the wheels struck upon a gravel drive.

She looked round somewhat curiously. They were passing through handsome and well-kept grounds. Flowers, shrubs, and beautiful trailing vines were to be seen on either hand. At a little distance stood a handsome, imposing mansion, built of dark-gray stone.

This was Fairlawn. Rachel had seen the place before, but she had never passed those ponderous gates, which, to her vivid imagination, had seemed to open into fairyland.

The carriage drew up before a side entrance. Colonel Heathcliff was lifted out and borne up the steps, but not before he had pressed Rachel's hand and whispered, earnestly:

"You will not go away without seeing me again?"

"No," she had answered, quickly, quite unable to resist his pleading glance.

She and Madame Gale were shown into the drawing-room, and left to themselves. Madame seemed unaccountably restless. She could not sit quietly a moment, but began to pace the floor with great strides like a man's, keeping her back turned upon Rachel.

Every now and then she muttered incoherently. It was a habit she had when greatly excited. Rachel only caught a word or two of what she was saying. "I knew this would come, sooner or later. God help us all!"

This was the only complete sentence that reached the girl's ears. She sat staring at madame's restless figure, very much frightened and amazed, and on the point of bursting into tears.

At last the woman turned sharply—faced her a moment, glaring at her in a hard, savage way, as if tempted to do something desperate, then went slowly from the room.

Rachel sat quite still, waiting. An interval passed—perhaps five minutes, perhaps fifteen—she felt incapable of measuring time—and then came the sound of rustling silk, and a lady stepped into the room through the low French window opening into the garden.

She stopped short at sight of Rachel's demure little figure, perched in one of the chairs of state that decorated the handsome parlor—stopped, uttered a quick exclamation, and then stood blandly smiling; looking down upon the shrinking girl.

She was a very handsome woman—a sort of middle-aged Cleopatra—with flashing dark eyes, dark hair, a white soft skin, pure and clear as an infant's, and a superb figure.

After a brief pause she moved forward a step or two. Something in the girl's face seemed to strike her attention suddenly. She stared at her fixedly, the rich color slowly ebbing from her cheeks.

"One of my daughter's friends, I suppose?" she said, speaking with apparent effort.

Rachel started at the sound of that voice. It was a peculiar voice, low, sweet, subtle. Once heard, it could never be forgotten.

Where had Rachel heard it? She knew in an instant. It was the voice of the lady who had been Madame Gale's companion in that moonlight ramble!

A strange horror and dread came over her at the thought. She caught her breath quickly. Some sharp sentence trembled on her lips, but she checked herself, and brought her color back, by a powerful effort.

"No," she stammered, faintly. "I do not know your daughter. I came here with Colonel Heathcliff."

The woman started back at these words as if she had been struck. Even her lips grew livid. A dead woman could not have looked more ghastly. She raised one of her jeweled hands, tried to speak, but her voice died away in a husky whisper.

CHAPTER IV.

WAS IT FATE?

At this instant footsteps approached the door. It was opened quickly, and Madame Gale entered.

A moment of breathless silence followed. There must have been strange thoughts in the mind of each of those three, as they stood and stared at each other.

Madame Gale was the first to speak. She looked anxious and worried.

"I came in search of you, Mrs. Heathcliff," she said, making a quick sign of caution.

The lady started; a shiver ran over her, and then she seemed to conquer the spell that held her senses in thrall.

"Oh, Agnes!" she shrieked, shaking her clenched hand in madame's face, "you have told that girl everything! You have brought her here to ruin me!"

Madame paled perceptibly, and her stern face grew sterner still.

"Hush!" she cried. "Be quiet! Take care what you say or you will regret it."

"What matters it what I say?" dropping into a chair, and beginning to wring her jeweled hands piteously. "You have betrayed me. I am a ruined woman."

"Fool!" snarled madame, in a savage whisper. "Get up and try to compose yourself. Unless you do, I wash my hands of your affairs from this moment."

Mrs. Heathcliff looked up a little luridly, and seemed to realize for the first time that her fears might have been premature.

"That girl!" she said, pointing darkly at Rachel, and speaking very low, "I know who she is. She came with my husband. Why was it—answer me that?"

"Do you not know that Colonel Heathcliff has been injured?"

"No," she answered, starting. "I have been walking in the garden. I just came in. Tell me all about it."

"He was thrown from his horse. Rachel and I chanced to witness the accident. We ran to his relief, and he insisted we should bring him home."

"That is all?"

Madame nodded.

"You have nothing to fear."

The color came slowly back to Mrs. Heathcliff's cheeks. She gave madame one long,

sharp glance, and then seemed to be satisfied. Her face resumed its natural expression once more; she even forced a faint smile to her lips.

"My head is in a whirl to-day," she said, turning toward Rachel once more. "I believe I am hysterical. You will forgive any wildness, any rudeness of which I have been guilty."

She said this in a tone of such soft appeal that Rachel, who had stood perplexed and silent, watching this scene with curious eyes, felt her heart melt within her.

"Do not distress yourself, dear lady," she said, eagerly. "And I am sure you have no reason to apologize."

Mrs. Heathcliff thanked her, and rose up feebly and with difficulty, as if she had suddenly grown old.

"I must go to my husband," she said. "Where have they taken him?"

"To his own room, I believe," answered madame.

She went out without another word. Madame sat very still for some minutes after she was gone. She seemed to be considering with herself. At last she pushed a chair close up to Rachel, and sat down.

"You must think all this is very strange," she said. "I can explain it in two words. Mrs. Heathcliff had a daughter who died, and you resemble her. I noticed the likeness myself. It struck Mrs. Heathcliff so forcibly as to quite unsettle her reason for a few minutes! You understand it all now?"

She paused, waiting for an answer. A swift shudder ran all over the poor girl. She suddenly flung out both her arms and burst into tears.

"Oh, madame, dear madame, for the love of heaven don't deceive me," she cried, hysterically.

Madame started, frowning darkly. She was scarcely prepared for this outbreak.

"Who said I was deceiving you?" she demanded, angrily.

"But you are, madame. I know you are keeping back the truth. There is something I am not to find out. It is cruel, cruel to keep me in this uncertainty."

She grasped Madame Gale's arm, and looked up into those inexorable eyes with an agony of entreaty that would have melted a heart of stone.

"THERE is some mystery between you and Mrs. Heathcliff," Rachel went on, wildly. "You have not given the true reason for her rudeness to me. She fears me—I saw it in her face. What does *she* know of me or mine? Oh, tell me!"

Madame angrily shook loose her arm. But she was evidently frightened.

"Little fool!" she muttered, with a shrug and a grimace. "What is this you are saying? I don't believe you know. Be quiet, child, or I shall think your brain is turned."

Rachel cowered in her chair, sobbing convulsively. She was growing more and more hysterical every minute. Her agitation promised soon to overstep all bounds.

Madame, as she sat staring at her dismally, with an odd look in her dark eyes, must have feared this. She arose suddenly, saying, in an impatient voice:

"Come away. You are not fit to remain here. We will go home."

Rachel shrunk away from her.

"No," she cried. "Colonel Heathcliff will send for me directly. I promised him I would remain."

"Bah! Bah!" with an ugly sneer. "He has forgotten your existence ere this. Don't be a fool, child."

She shifted uneasily, but Rachel did not stir. Seeing this, she fell to coaxing and flattering. She was evidently bent on getting the girl out of the house as quickly as possible.

Before she had succeeded in her purpose, a servant tapped at the door. He brought a message.

"Colonel Heathcliff wishes to see the young lady."

Rachel sprung to her feet with a cry of delight.

"He has not forgotten me!" she exclaimed. "I was sure he would not. Madame, take me to him, at once. I am certain you know the way."

Madame gave a scared sort of grunt. For a moment she stood debating with herself; but something in Rachel's face seemed to decide her.

"You don't know what is best for you," she said, flushing. "But I am done reasoning. If you will see that man, follow me."

She flung open the door, crossed the hall, and began to thread a long passage branching away to the right. Rachel followed her, eager and expectant, but all atremble. Somehow she felt relieved at the thought that she was going to see Colonel Heathcliff again—almost happy, in fact.

Madame paused before a door at the end of the passage. At the same instant it was quickly opened from within, and a young lady stepped out to meet them.

She was very beautiful and richly dressed. She had a brilliant complexion, full of tints as exquisite as an artist's creation, great almond-shaped eyes of soft gloom, and silky blue-black hair.

She shot Rachel a swift look from underneath her long lashes. Was it fancy—or did a dark, almost malignant expression come into those splendid orbs?

Before Rachel had time to more than form the question in her own mind, the young beauty was greeting Madame Gale quite cordially.

"It's an unexpected pleasure to welcome you to Fairlawn, madame," she said, in a rich, musical voice. Then she stopped short, and colored a little.

It had just occurred to her that the platitude sounded somewhat absurd, perhaps, when the circumstance that had occasioned madame's visit was taken into consideration.

Madame smiled and shrugged. "Don't waste compliments upon an old wretch like me, Grace, unless you wish to come to grief," was her response.

"That's a warning, I suppose. No matter." She paused, and stole another glance at Rachel. "Please introduce me to your young friend," she added, in an aside.

"Bah!" snarled madame, maliciously. "I wonder if you will say it's a pleasure to see Rachel here?"

Without waiting for a reply, she went through the form of the introduction. "Miss Grace Atherton, Miss Rachel Clyde."

Miss Atherton held out her hand. "I hope we will be friends, Miss Clyde," she said, forcing a smile. "I will see you again presently."

She bowed, and passed on. Rachel shivered, as though a cold draft of air had blown over her, and shrunk closer to her companion's side, without knowing why.

Madame's keen eyes caught the movement. She rubbed her wrinkled little hands together, beginning to laugh.

"I'm afraid you are not pleased with Grace," she said, abruptly.

"I don't know," answered Rachel. "She is very beautiful. I am sure she ought to be very good."

"Humph!" grunted madame. Rachel gave her a swift glance and went on to ask:

"Who is she?"

"Grace Atherton? I thought you would guess. Mrs. Heathcliff has been married twice. Grace is the offspring of the first marriage."

"Ah!" murmured Rachel, with a sudden revulsion of feeling.

She had begun vaguely to suspect that Mrs. Heathcliff must be her own mother. But, at these words of madame's, the half formed hope was dissipated.

Grace and she were very dissimilar. Nature plays odd freaks sometimes, but nothing so odd as a close relationship between her and Grace would have been.

In the midst of these reflections madame thrust open the door. An instant later Rachel was standing dizzy and dismayed, beside the couch on which Colonel Heathcliff was lying,

and his wonderful blue eyes, with their soft languor, were again scanning her lovely face.

"It was very kind of you to remain," he said, just above his breath.

Rachel flushed a little, and answered:

"I could not think of going, sir, after you had asked me to stay."

"Thank you, Rachel."

He smiled. "What a dear little innocent it is," he thought.

A brief silence followed. Madame Gale broke it by saying, sharply:

"I suppose the doctor has been with you?"

"Yes."

"What does he say?"

"I have broken no bones. Two weeks will set me on my feet again."

His gaze wandered back to Rachel before this brief dialogue was fairly ended. He seemed to begrudge every moment that was given up to others.

"You see I am to play the role of invalid for the present, my dear," he said, with a sad, sweet smile. "All sick persons are exacting and selfish. I wish I dared be."

Rachel saw what a wistful look he gave her, and murmured, faintly:

"What would you do, sir?"

"I should insist on keeping you at Fairlawn to nurse me."

She gave a great start of surprise, and so did madame, and the latter cried out, quickly:

"No, no! That could not be!"

At this instant Mrs. Heathcliff advanced from the far end of the apartment, where she had been standing with her back to them. She was bland and smiling, but her lips were white.

"I heard what my husband was saying," giving Madame Gale a significant look. "It is my wish, as well as his, that Miss Clyde should remain."

Madame dropped her eyes, tapping the carpet nervously with her foot.

"I believe you are all going crazy," she muttered.

"No," responded Mrs. Heathcliff, sweetly. "But my husband has taken a violent fancy to Miss Rachel. He and I were discussing the matter before you came in. He does not wish her to go away; and of course he must be humored."

She forced a laugh, staring at madame in a hard, lurid way the latter did not like. And so, after a moment's thinking, madame made answer:

"If you are really in earnest I shall not oppose you. Rachel can remain."

Then she drew Mrs. Heathcliff abruptly to one side.

"What have you done?" she cried, in a fierce whisper. "How dare you keep that girl here, Pauline?"

"Hush!" was the low answer. "What else could I do? I could not send her away against my husband's wishes."

"True."

Madame heaved a deep sigh, and said no more. But her face grew graver and sterner than before, and she cast uneasy glances toward the couch where the master of Fairlawn was lying.

What was the nature of the dread she evidently experienced?

An hour later she quitted the house alone, and another great question in Rachel's life-drama was thus decided.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOUQUET'S MESSAGE.

"WHAT wonderful changes even twenty-four short hours can make in the current of one's life," thought Rachel, as she sat in her private room at Fairlawn that night.

It was a beautiful chamber with pictures and statuettes adorning the walls, a soft rich carpet upon the floor, and curtains of creamy lace falling away from the large windows. Gazing around, with a bright, pleased smile, she thought she had never seen anything so pretty, so comfortable in all her life.

It was a change from the close little bedroom under the roof she had occupied at Madame Gale's.

The events that had wrought this transformation seemed like a bewildering dream. Rachel almost feared to close her eyes lest all the beauty and elegance should vanish, and she should find herself back again in the old hot, comfortless apartment.

Everybody had been very kind to her. Even Mrs. Heathcliff and Grace had unbent a little from their usual haughtiness of spirit, spoken a few gracious words, and made an effort to place her at ease among them.

But she felt that she could like no one half so well as the master of Fairlawn himself.

Idling there in the dreamy stillness of her chamber, she tried to analyze the fascination he exercised. It was not his handsome face with its sadness and languor and wonderful blue eyes that drew her to him so strongly; it was not his smile, so sweet, tender and sympathetic; it was not even his kindness or the extraordinary interest he manifested in herself.

No; the cause of the glamour must be looked for elsewhere. She felt its power and yielded to it, without knowing whence it came.

Colonel Heathcliff seemed like one to reverence—to raise to the topmost seat among her idols. It was no silly, romantic passion she had conceived for him, but a reverential love and trust, such as she might have given to her own father, had she ever known him.

The deep reverie into which she had fallen was a dangerous one, and it was well, perhaps, that a quick tap at the door soon brought her wandering spirit back to this everyday world.

One of the maids stood without.

"Miss Grace is in the drawing-room," she said, courtesying quite low to Rachel. "She would be pleased to have you join her there, if agreeable."

"Certainly."

Rachel stole softly down the stairs, her heart fluttering a little faster than its wont. Truth to tell, she was just a little afraid of this haughty beauty.

Grace flung open the drawing-room door, and called to her quite graciously:

"Come in, Miss Clyde. I was lonely; that is why I sent for you."

She swept languidly to a seat. Rachel thought her more beautiful than ever in the soft sheen of the lamplight. Her eyes glittered brightly, and a sumptuous carmine stained either cheek. Her dress was a rich silk, relieved by heavy folds of rare old lace.

Rachel had never seen so magnificent a woman. No one would ever have thought of calling her sweet or lovely. Superb was the only word that fitted her.

She would have shone a star in the festive crowd—a queen reigning by right of her marvelous beauty, to which even the coldest hermit must have paid unwilling tribute.

"I thought we ought to make each other's acquaintance as soon as possible, since you are to remain here for the present," she said, quietly. "Odd, isn't it, that papa Heathcliff should have taken such a liking to you?"

Rachel shrunk a little from the bold glare of those flashing orbs, and murmured something to the effect that she "thought it quite unaccountable."

Grace laughed at her reply, whatever it was.

"What a demure little thing you are!" she exclaimed. "Not a shadow of vanity or coquetry in your disposition! I've been watching you, Jenny Wren, and I flatter myself that I can read people passably well."

"Oh, Miss Atherton!"

"Did I frighten you? Or are you only shocked at my funny way of talking? Never mind, you'll soon get used to it, and will not mind it."

She saw Rachel change color a little, and, laughing carelessly, crossed to the piano and opened it. Perhaps she was anxious to clear

away the unfavorable impression she had created.

"Do you play, Miss Clyde?" she said, rather doubtfully.

"A little."

Rachel's eyes began to sparkle, and a soft flush crept into her cheeks.

"I love music," she added apologetically.

"It is my only passion."

Grace opened wide her eyes.

"Did Madame Gale provide you with instructors?" she asked.

"Oh, yes; madame has been very good to me in that respect."

"Humph! I would not have believed it."

She paled perceptibly, as she spoke. Some gust of passion seemed to sweep over her. Her splendid eyes flashed more and more brightly, and her breath came short and quick.

Whatever may have caused her emotion, it was over in an instant. Blandly smiling, she drew her reluctant companion to the piano.

"I am anxious to hear you play, Miss Clyde. You will oblige me?"

"If you really wish it."

Rachel trembled a little as she took her seat at the piano. At first her fingers ran over the keys somewhat unsteadily. Then, gaining courage, as her soul filled with the inspiration of music, she struck into an air of such tangled sweetness, such a low, tender babbling of melody and delicious sounds, that Grace held her breath to listen.

The rippling notes died away—a few hard chords gave out their hoarse undertone, and then the melody broke out again, this time loud, fierce, exultant, like an imprisoned soul that had burst its bonds asunder.

The notes rose, fell, crashed through the silent room, melting at last into the dreamy hush of the summer night.

Rachel's hands slid away from the keyboard. She sat quite still, drawing a long, sobbing breath.

"Bravo!" cried a voice from the doorway, and there came suddenly the sound of a noisy encore.

Grace looked up, biting the blood from her full red lip.

"Dr. Tremaine!" she cried out, sharply.

He came quickly forward—a tall, handsome man of twenty-five, with a proud, high-bred face, and a pair of wonderfully keen, bright dark eyes.

"I heard the music," he said, apologetically, "and could not bear to ring, thus breaking the spell."

"The old fable of Orpheus over again," laughed Grace. "However, you are very welcome."

He bowed in acknowledgment, and said, quietly:

"It is a real surprise to meet Miss Clyde here."

Rachel rose at that, smiled very faintly, and moved away from the piano. The sheen of tears was in her violet eyes. Grace regarded her wonderingly.

"I'm afraid I have pained you in some way," she said.

"Oh, no, no!" cried Rachel, choking back her sobs, and moving still further away.

Grace followed her relentlessly.

"You are grieved—wounded," she persisted.

"Will you not tell me why?"

"It was the music. I shouldn't have played that piece. I don't know what possessed me. I used to play it for somebody who is very dear to me. I have not played it for months until to-night."

The last words were huskily spoken. She gave Grace a pleading look that might have melted a heart of stone.

"Perhaps your friend is dead?" went on that rich, musical voice, so full of seeming sympathy.

"No, no, he is not dead. At least I hope he is not."

Rachel could say no more. She ran to the open window, and stood there with her face hidden, looking out into the dusky night.

"What an artless child," declared Grace, glancing up swiftly into the grave countenance of Dr. Tremaine. "Did you ever see anybody so perfectly unsophisticated?"

"Society has not spoiled her," he answered. "God grant it never may."

She lifted her eyebrows a little.

"Of course it is all very pretty, Dr. Tremaine. It's like a new sensation to meet a woman who wears her heart on her sleeve. One very rarely has that pleasure. I wonder if poor Rachel has lost her lover!"

He bit his lip savagely, but made no answer. Grace was shrewd enough to see he did not like the turn conversation was taking, and so abruptly changed the subject.

A brief interval passed. While Dr. Tremaine and Grace talked, they fell, half-unconsciously, to watching the still figure of Rachel by the open window.

Suddenly they saw her draw back with a stifled cry. At the same instant a small bouquet of tuberoses was flung through the window by an unseen hand, and fell at her feet.

She picked it up, glancing sharply round as she did so. Her face blanched, and she drew a long, sobbing breath.

Grace ran up to her.

"You are ill, Miss Clyde," she exclaimed.

"You look a ghost."

Rachel's eyes dilated a little. She made one or two futile attempts to hide the bouquet, looking very white and frightened as she did so.

"No," she gasped. "Please don't mind me. It's a sudden faintness, and will be over directly."

She looked so pale and miserable that any other person would have been moved to pity. But Grace Atherton did not know the meaning of the word.

"I hope so, my dear. Here is my vinaigrette. Sit down; you are not fit to stand."

Then, bending over her with an air of well-simulated solicitude, she added:

"What lovely flowers! They were thrown through the window, were they not?"

Rachel felt Dr. Tremaine's curious eyes fixed upon her face, and longed to sink through the floor as she answered faintly:

"They were."

"How odd!" Grace forced a laugh. "You must have made a conquest, Miss Clyde. Shall I congratulate you upon your unknown admirer who prefers to hide himself in the dark?"

Rachel attempted no reply. But she looked so miserable that Dr. Tremaine came to her relief.

"I wish I might trouble you for one of your new songs, Miss Atherton."

"Certainly," answered the beauty, her lip curling disdainfully.

Dr. Tremaine led her to the piano. But he was not by any means unmindful of the beaming look of gratitude vouchsafed him by a pair of misty, violet eyes.

I fear he saw those tear-wet eyes, and that white, pleading face far more distinctly than he did the notes on the music-leaf he turned for Grace a few moments later.

As for Rachel, she sat very still, looking hard at the bouquet she held. Tuberoses! She knew full well whose favorite flower they were. Their sweetness turned her sick. A thousand fears beset her.

Suddenly she felt a paper rustle under her hand. Parting the clustering leaves, she drew out a tiny note, literally smothered in sweets, hidden away in the very heart of the bouquet.

Dr. Tremaine and Grace were still at the piano. They had their backs to her. Spreading the note open with a trembling hand, she read these words:

"I heard you playing that old tune I used to love so well, just now. Do you know what the sweet notes told me, Rachel? They told me that I was not forgotten, that some kindly memories were still cherished in your heart for me."

"I must see you. Come out in the garden as soon as you can get away. I shall wait for you there."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERIOUS MEETING.

THE lines of this note were written in a stiff, crabbed hand. A lead pencil had been used, and the words were uneven and jagged, sometimes even running into each other, as if the writer had had insufficient light for his purpose.

There was no signature. None was needed. Rachel would have known that hand anywhere, despite its present irregularity.

The words, too, were amply significant. She read them two or three times over, growing paler and more frightened-looking each time, and at last crumpled the note in her hand.

"God help me!" she murmured.

Then she began to tremble. The words of the song Grace was singing with such abandon at that moment, sounded indistinct and far-off; she grew giddy; the lights seemed to dance before her eyes—the room to swing round and round.

She struggled hard against the faintness that beset her, and at last conquered it. Rising slowly and with difficulty, she tottered forward a few steps.

"I am not well," she said, faintly. "You will excuse me, Miss Atherton?"

Grace stopped short in the noisy interlude she was playing.

"Of course you can go, if you are ill," she answered, with a shrug. "I don't believe it is good for you to receive anonymous bouquets."

It was a bitter shot, and hit hard. Rachel put out her hand involuntarily, as if to shield herself from a blow, clinging to the nearest chair for support meanwhile.

Dr. Tremaine's handsome face darkened. He leaned toward Rachel, whispered a word or two in her ear, and sliding his arm about her, led her to the door.

Grace followed them with her eyes. They lingered a moment or two on the threshold, and a few more words, very low and very earnest, were spoken by Dr. Tremaine.

Grace bit her lip fiercely.

"Good God!" she hissed, between her close-set teeth. "Is that girl to be the bane of my whole life? Is she to steal his love from me, with all the rest? Ah, how I hate her!"

Dr. Tremaine turned back with a slow and thoughtful step when Rachel was gone. He looked very pale and grave.

"I know you pity Miss Clyde," said Grace, sweetly, laying her hand on his arm. "You think she has some great trouble to bear."

He started slightly, and answered:

"I do."

"Poor dear. I quite agree with you. But she does not confide in me. I can only guess the nature of her sorrow."

She heaved a deep sigh. After a moment's silence she resumed:

"Miss Clyde must have met with some terrible disappointment. A lover turned out badly, perhaps. How long have you known her, Dr. Tremaine?"

"Three or four weeks."

"And my acquaintance with her dates back only a few hours. You have the advantage of me."

A brief silence fell, which was broken by Dr. Tremaine.

"Why is she here?" he asked.

"To humor a whim of my father's. The whole circumstance is quite romantic. I will relate it in detail, some time."

She smiled, a trifle satirically, it seemed. Moving across the floor, with the firm, majestic tread of a queen, a sudden cry broke from her lips.

"Who passed the window, just now?" she demanded. "Did you see no one?"

Dr. Tremaine answered in the negative.

"Surely I was not mistaken! A shadow seemed to flit quickly past—a woman's figure. Just heaven!—it was not Miss Clyde?"

She stood still and looked at her companion with an expression of odd, almost startled inquiry.

He made no answer, but paled perceptibly. Some sudden fear or pang of suspicion seemed to strike him dumb.

"It must have been Miss Clyde," she went on, sharply. "Dr. Tremaine, you must follow her."

"No, no."

"You must! The poor child will do some mischief to herself. I know there is something wrong. Go!"

He still hesitated. There were great beads of moisture on his forehead.

Grace played her *role* well. She seemed almost wild with fright and dread of what was about to happen. She darted into the hall and flung a light scarf over her head.

"You shall go!" she cried, sharply. "See, I am going with you. That poor child! She is mad to go wandering about at this hour of the night. Oh, you will not let any harm come to her, Dr. Tremaine?"

"God forbid!" he answered, in a deep voice.

No further urging was necessary. He took Grace's hand in his, and they left the house together.

"This way," she whispered, turning into the nearest path. "I am sure the figure went this way."

They walked on rapidly. It was a very narrow path, sheltered by acacias and other flowering shrubs that made the night air heavy with sweets.

Near the lower extremity was an arbor. They had nearly reached this when they caught a glimpse of a slight, girlish figure a few yards in advance.

"There she is," said Grace, softly. "It is Miss Clyde."

At the same instant a second figure stepped into the path—that of a tall man enveloped in a cloak. Rachel seemed to stare at him breathlessly a moment, then she flung both arms about his neck and clung there, sobbing on his breast as if her heart would break.

"Rachel, my darling, Rachel," murmured a rich, musical voice.

"It is you! Oh, God be praised!" the girl cried out, sharply.

Then there was a silence. Dr. Tremaine had caught the words very distinctly. He stood motionless, staring hard at the two figures standing so close together in the path.

Grace pulled at his sleeve.

"They must not see us," she whispered, and drew him quickly into the profound gloom of the acacias.

He yielded, because he scarcely realized what she was doing. For a few seconds not a sound could be heard save Rachel's smothered sobs. But at last she raised her head.

"Oh, why have you come back?" she asked, in a voice of tender reproach.

"To see you, Rachel," answered the stranger, eagerly.

"My darling—my darling!"

"Don't cry," soothingly. "Are you not glad to see me?"

"Yes, yes. But—"

"But what, Rachel?"

"You should not have come here, even to see me! It was too great a risk. It would kill me if anything were to happen to you."

Her sobs broke out afresh, and she kissed him over and over again with an abandonment of love and grief and despair almost frightful to witness.

"Go away," she cried, imploringly. "Go away before anybody sees you. I can scarcely breathe while you linger here."

"Go, and leave you, Rachel?"

"Ay, leave me. Do you think I am so utterly selfish that I would keep you here? No, no!"

After a moment's silence the stranger said:

"If I do go, I must see you very soon again."

"You shall. Only be cautious. Promise me that you will be cautious."

"I promise—for your sake."

"God bless you. There—there! Good-by."

She pushed him from her, hesitated a moment, and then drew him back again, clinging more closely to him than ever.

"Oh, I cannot let you go!" she moaned. "I cannot. My heart is breaking."

"Poor, poor Rachel!"

"I have only you to love. The world would be very blank without you. How can I give you up? But I must—I must!"

She sobbed so piteously that he caught her in his arms and kissed her again and again.

"Rachel, try to be patient," he pleaded.

"Have not I been patient? It will all come right by and by, perhaps, if we only trust the Lord. It is very hard to trust Him sometimes, when everything looks so desperate and gloomy—at least I have found it so. But, He never *does* forsake us if we lean on Him. I am trying to do that, and I want you to try, my darling."

"I will—oh, I will!" she cried. "Only I am so weak—so miserable."

"May He give you strength. Now I am going. Come a little way with me—to the wicket down yonder. Will you?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. It seems so good to be with you again, and to know that you love me as well as ever."

"I shall always love you."

"I believe you will. Was it not strange that I found you so easily? God must have guided me. I thought you were at Madame Gale's; I was going to you there when I heard the music—the same dear old pieces I used to love so well. I knew no one else could play them like that, and I crept into the grounds and saw you through the window. Then I scrawled that note to you, and hid it in the bouquet of tuberoses. I knew you would think of me when you saw the tuberoses, darling."

Rachel made some low voiced answer. Then the pair began to move away.

When the soft fall of their footsteps was lost in the distance Dr. Tremaine shook himself, as if awakening from some frightful dream. He had not meant to listen, but had crouched in the shrubbery like one transfixed.

Grace followed him into the path.

"I am very sorry I ever brought you here," she said, deprecatingly. "But how was I to know? Miss Clyde looked so wild and troubled that I feared she meant to do harm to herself. I ought to have guessed the truth from that bouquet, perhaps. But I did not."

"We had no right to listen," the doctor returned, coldly and constrainedly. "We have overheard what was never intended for our ears. I regret it very much. But the fault was as much mine as yours."

Then he relapsed into silence, only saying "good-night" at the door, and going away quite abruptly.

CHAPTER VII.

SPINNING THE DEVIL'S YARN.

RACHEL came down-stairs looking so pale and wan the next morning, that even Mrs. Heathcliff grew solicitous.

"I fear you are not happy with us, my child," she said, speaking quite kindly. "If that is so, you have only to tell my husband. I know he would not detain you here against your wish."

"It is not that," answered Rachel, eagerly; "indeed it is not."

Grace was standing near, and a wicked smile curled her beautiful lips. But she said nothing.

Colonel Heathcliff, too, observed the change in Rachel, and his languid blue eyes grew strangely troubled in their expression as he fixed them upon her face.

"You are losing your roses," he said, gently. "Is it I who am stealing them away from you?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"What then? Is Fairlawn like a cage, that you beat your wings against its bars?"

"No," she answered, softly. "I think I could be very happy here. I do not wish to go away while you need me."

He laughed softly to himself, and said, after a pause:

"Then you will remain here forever; but you must not make yourself ill nursing me. I shall not permit that."

Then, beckoning his wife to approach, he added:

"I am going to send you both out for a walk. Take my word for it, you will come back refreshed."

Mrs. Heathcliff bit her lip, and looked slightly displeased, but she instantly rung for her hat and scarf.

"My husband knows how to be very tyrannical, Miss Clyde," she said, with a forced laugh. "We might as well yield at once."

She moved toward the door, waiting for Rachel to follow. The girl arose with extreme reluctance. She would much rather have remained.

Mrs. Heathcliff was in a very gracious mood. She began talking glibly when they were once in the open air. She selected the most public walks, and seemed determined to extract its full enjoyment from the beautiful morning.

Presently a man turned into the walk from one of the side paths. He came straight toward them. Of course they had met scores of other men already during their brief ramble, but, somehow, this one excited Rachel's curiosity.

Mrs. Heathcliff was walking with her eyes fixed upon the ground. Though the man was coming straight toward them, and walking in a hurried, nervous manner, calculated to excite suspicion, she took no notice of him until they came face to face.

Then she glanced up quickly, and came to a sudden stand still. Her features grew convulsed, and she bit her lip fiercely. Some spasm of pain or fear or anguish seemed to shake her whole body.

"You?" she cried out, sharply.

The exclamation was involuntary—wrung from her in the surprise and confusion of the moment. The man shrugged and smiled.

"Yes, Mrs. Heathcliff," he replied, calmly.

"You were not expecting me?"

"No."

She rallied a little, stepped forward, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Tell me, Edward Dent," she demanded, "what brings you here?"

He hesitated, glancing back at Rachel—a glance in which admiration and curiosity were singularly blended.

"This young lady is a stranger to me, Mrs. Heathcliff. Excuse me if I am not communicative in her presence."

These words were spoken in a suppressed voice. But softly as they were uttered, Rachel caught them distinctly. She looked fixedly at the man a moment, then a shiver shook her frame.

He was a great, loutish, ungainly fellow, with ridiculously long limbs, a thin, dark face, and a pair of small, twinkling, deep-set eyes, that burned under their bushy black brows like globes of fire. Rachel shrunk from him with an instinctive feeling of repugnance.

Mrs. Heathcliff had seen the man's admiring look, as well as the look with which Rachel answered it. She smiled softly to herself, and said:

"Mr. Dent, pray allow me to present my young friend and protege, Miss Rachel Clyde."

The man started perceptibly. He gave Mrs. Heathcliff a quick glance, as if to assure himself she was not trifling with him. Then he doffed his hat somewhat awkwardly.

"I'm sure this is a pleasure, miss," stammered he. "It's always pleasant to meet anybody so young and beautiful. Besides, I knew your—"

"Hush!" cried Mrs. Heathcliff, sharply.

She stepped quickly between the two.

"Rachel," she added, speaking in a tone of suppressed excitement, "I think we have walked far enough. Shall we turn back?"

"If you please, madam."

"I do please. I'm tired and out of sorts. I couldn't go a step further."

She turned, snatching Rachel's hand as she did so, and literally dragging her along the path by which they had come.

Two or three long strides brought the man she had called Edward Dent to her side again. He looked down at her with a disagreeable smile.

"This is not the way old friends should meet or part, Mrs. Heathcliff," and he grinned, sarcastically.

She drew a quick breath, growing quite pale with anger and terror.

"Forgive me," she faltered. "I'm not well."

"Humph! Perhaps you are well enough to invite me to Fairlawn."

"To Fairlawn?"

"Yes, I am anxious to quarter myself there for the present. Nay, don't make any apologies. I am quite ready to take up with such accommodations as you have to offer."

He ended with another of those disagreeable smiles. Mrs. Heathcliff shook from head to foot. But, with a strength of will worthy a better cause, she turned, after a brief silence, saying graciously:

"Of course you are very welcome. Pardon me for not having offered the hospitalities of Fairlawn sooner."

Then she fell back a little, signing for him to follow her example. The instant Rachel had passed beyond the reach of their voices she said, between her shut teeth:

"What do you mean by coming here, and forcing yours—lf upon us?"

"I came," he answered, with a sneer, "because it was my pleasure, and because a certain person in whom we are both interested is lurking somewhere in this neighborhood."

Mrs. Heathcliff started, stared wildly, and cried, with a shiver in her voice:

"Impossible! He is not here?"

"I have every reason to believe that he is. He disappeared suddenly from his old haunts, at least, and we could find no trace of him."

"Would he dare come this way?"

"He would dare anything. Such another reckless devil I never saw. Of course I saw the necessity of following him."

"Of course," she echoed, and then relapsed into silence.

"As to forcing myself upon you," he added, presently, "to whom could I go in this emergency, save to my very dear friend, Mrs. Heathcliff?"

She suddenly clasped her fingers over her temples.

"My husband," she murmured. "What shall I say to him? How explain your presence in the house?"

"Humph! That is your concern. You can say I am some relative, if you wish. I shall not contradict you."

She hesitated, gave him a quick, half-imploping glance, and finally said:

"Why will you go to Fairlawn? There are hotels in the neighborhood. You might stop at one of those."

"I would rather not," he answered, shrugging—an odd light coming into his flashing black eyes. "I have a reason for wishing to remain underneath your roof."

"What reason?"

His glance swept forward, rested upon Rachel's trim, elegant figure an instant, and then he replied:

"Love!"

Mrs. Heathcliff started as if she had been struck. She stared stupidly at him.

"Impossible!"

"It is true," he said, coolly. "I don't wonder you are surprised. It's a case of love at first sight. Such things do happen, even at my time of life. Miss Clyde is pretty as a picture. I'm really quite smitten with her."

He was dead in earnest—there could be no doubt of that. Mrs. Heathcliff looked thoughtful. She clasped and unclasped her hands several times, in a nervous manner. At last she turned to her companion with an expression of unmistakable relief upon her face.

"Good!" she exclaimed. "I believe I'm glad you have taken a fancy to the girl. It will save me a world of trouble, perhaps, for I know you will never dare to play me false. You shall marry her!"

"Shall I?" he laughed. "Perhaps she will not marry me."

"She shall be made to marry you," answered Mrs. Heathcliff, compressing her lips sternly.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HEART'S CRY.

MR. EDWARD DENT was installed at Fairlawn as an honored guest. Colonel Heathcliff made no attempt to conceal his surprise at the visit, but he treated him with uniform courtesy and politeness.

"You will find Edward very eccentric," Mrs. Heathcliff had said to her husband, at the outset. "But I know you will be kind to him for my sake."

"Certainly," the colonel made answer.

"You say he is a relative?"

She hesitated, flushed a little, and replied:

"A cousin, on my mother's side."

"I never heard you speak of him."

"No. I used to see him sometimes, when a child. But we had not met for many years. I had almost forgotten him."

Colonel Heathcliff looked thoughtful.

"I hope he has not degenerated any in all these years," he said, after a pause.

"I don't know. I can only tell you that he is very rich. He seems to have made money rapidly. He may leave it all to Grace if we are kind to him."

"True, my dear. You may rest assured I shall do nothing to blast Grace's hopes in that direction."

And so Mr. Edward Dent, in spite of his innate coarseness and vulgarity, and the suspicious suddenness of his appearance among them, became domiciled in the household.

Perhaps Rachel was the only person who really suffered because of his presence in the house. But his manner toward herself filled her with alarm and uneasiness.

He rarely sought the chamber where Colonel Heathcliff still lay, rapidly recovering from his bruises. But the girl could not stir outside the sacred precincts of that room without encountering him.

He followed her into the garden, if she went there for a breath of fresh air or a little exercise. If she sought the music-room, he was by her side in an instant. In the spacious parlors she could never be free from the annoyance of his presence.

The nature of his attentions could scarcely be mistaken. He was ludicrously devoted and loverlike, considering the shortness of their acquaintance. Rachel was not even civil to him, for she could not conceal the disgust and abhorrence he inspired.

The girl would have been very unhappy but for the pleasure she experienced in Colonel Heathcliff's society and attending upon his wants.

Dr. Tremaine came to Fairlawn frequently. But a strange coldness had crept into his manner toward Rachel. He manifested a reluctance to seek her society that cut her to the heart.

One day he came in and found her alone in the drawing-room. With ordinary politeness, he could do no less than linger to say a few words to her. In the midst of their conversation the door was thrust open, and Mr. Dent looked in.

"Ah!" he said, frowning a little, at sight of Dr. Tremaine. "You are engaged, Miss Clyde? I have something particular to say to you."

His manner gave emphasis to his words. He advanced slowly into the apartment. Rachel grew very white, and clung involuntarily to the arm of her companion.

"Take me away," she whispered. "To the garden—anywhere—so that we escape that man!"

Dr. Tremaine's arm slid about her waist. He led her toward the door, looking very stern and resolute.

"Let us pass, if you please," he said, for Mr. Dent had halted directly in their way.

The man hesitated an instant. Something of rage and hatred mingled in the dark villainy of his countenance. But he caught the sudden fire that leaped into Dr. Tremaine's eyes, and wisely drew back.

"Certainly, sir," he said, with an awkward bow. "I did not know you were going out."

"We are."

He knitted his brow, and returned, speaking in a very low voice:

"I must beg an interview with Miss Clyde when she is at liberty."

Dr. Tremaine passed out, making no response. He led Rachel to the conservatory. The door stood open, and she looked so white and frightened that he dared take her no further.

"You are ill," he said, gently, drawing up a stool in the shadow of the vines. "We will wait here until you are better. Or do you wish me to summon assistance?"

"No, no," she answered, hastily. "Don't leave me."

She was shaking from head to foot. After a little she grew calmer.

"I know you think me very foolish," she murmured, with a faint smile. "Nothing ails me. I was only frightened."

"Mr. Dent frightened you?"

"Yes," she answered reluctantly.

"You do not like that man?" he went on, giving her a swift glance.

She shuddered, and slowly shook her head.

"I am glad of that," and a strange earnestness seemed to creep into his manner. "I have been watching him, Miss Clyde. I am sure he cannot be trusted. I would be very sorry if you were to make a friend of him."

He stopped abruptly, moved away a few steps, and presently came back again.

"Would to heaven, Rachel," he cried out, in fierce, eager voice, "that I had the right to shield you!"

The words seemed to have been wrung from him in the anguish and delirium of the moment. He had paused before her with his gleaming eyes fixed upon her face, his own handsome features being strangely convulsed.

Rachel started. A flush swept up to her temples. She put out her hands deprecatingly.

"Oh, Dr. Tremaine!" she faltered.

Her voice failed her with these words. She clasped her hands over her brow, glaring at him wildly, and seeming to shrink within herself as if pained or shocked by what had happened.

It was only the natural action of a pure-hearted girl, under the circumstances. She thought she had been bold, unmaidenly. It suddenly occurred to her that she had brought about this interview—Dr. Tremaine had not sought it!

Perhaps his great pity was prompting the words he uttered!

She felt stunned, humiliated. She could not speak, but she moved slightly away from him.

A bitter smile curled Dr. Tremaine's handsome lip as he observed his action. Of course he entirely misapprehended her motive.

"Forgive me," he said, looking very pale, and speaking rapidly. "I have no right to pain you. I will not. My secret shall lie buried in my heart, where it has lain for many days already."

She glanced up at him at that. How white and miserable he looked! Oh, if she only could—if she only dared tell him what was passing in her heart!

But, her lips were dumb. She moved, moaned, but that was all.

"I think I was mad for one brief moment," he went on. "I had seen that villain's persecutions, and longed to shield you. I could not see you suffer. But I knew, all the time, you

could never love me—that your affections were given to another."

She started, stared more wildly than before, and suddenly recovered her voice.

"Another?" she gasped.

"Forgive me for having surprised your secret," he said. "It was the result of accident."

"What do you mean?"

He looked fixedly at her a moment, and then made answer:

"This love of which I spoke. I think you have reasons for keeping it a secret."

She began to comprehend what he meant. A sudden flame swept over her face, and then receded, leaving it pale and cold. She sat with her hands locked in her lap, in a manner that told of suppressed passion.

"God help me," she murmured.

He stooped over her suddenly. His lips touched her hair.

"God help you, and God bless you!" he exclaimed.

He turned, moving slowly toward the door. Rachel glanced after him, piteously, helplessly—a glance that must have broken down all barriers, had he only seen it.

But he did not. He moved further and further away. Another moment, and the door would have been closed between them.

Rachel could bear the anguish of parting no longer. She flung out her hands wildly.

"Come back—come back!" she faltered. "I shall die if you leave me. Come back, and I will tell you all!"

The words did not reach his ears, but he caught the murmur of her voice. He hesitated, turned, and darted to her side.

"Oh, my darling," he whispered, "I cannot leave you!"

He stooped as if to gather her into his arms. A soft, gliding footstep, and the sharp rustling of silk, reached his ears at the same moment. He drew back and waited.

The door opened quickly, and Grace Atherton came gliding into the conservatory.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BAFFLED BEAUTY.

GRACE paused near the threshold, evidently startled by the unexpected tableau that met her gaze.

The rich color forsook lip and cheek. She clenched her teeth involuntarily. It was impossible to mistake the meaning of that scene. For an instant she leaned giddily against the wall, with the mask torn utterly from her pallid face, and her secret soul laid bare.

Then she rallied. Forcing a smile to her lips, she advanced a little further into the conservatory.

Around her was fragrance and beauty and riotous bloom; green vines trailing from pillars and arches; flowers bursting into gorgeous bloom, with the summer sunlight lying warm and golden over all.

She could never bear the sight of flowers afterward, and some odors turned her sick.

"Pardon me," she said, softly. "I thought the conservatory was deserted."

Mr. Tremaine held out his hand.

"I came to make my customary call, Miss Atherton," he said, with grave dignity. "I am glad to have met you."

She bowed in acknowledgment, looked hard at Rachel, who sat pale and quivering in the shadow of an oleander, and knitted her brows, as if at a loss whether to go or stay.

Rachel saved her the trouble of a decision by rising abruptly and moving away with a slow uncertain step.

Grace called after her:

"Mr. Dent is waiting for you. You will find him in the front parlor. I promised to send you to him."

Rachel's reply was inarticulate. She closed the door and fled across the hall and up the stairs, never pausing to take breath until she had reached her own room, and the door was securely locked against all intruders.

Then she flung herself on the couch sobbing

and wringing her hands as if her very heart would break.

"It is all over," she moaned. "Dr. Tremaine will think me cold and ungrateful, and oh, my heart is bursting with the wretchedness of it all!"

She scarcely thought of Mr. Dent, except to wonder how she could best avoid him.

Grace, meanwhile, was standing under a delicate arch of vines, covertly scanning Dr. Tremaine's grave face, and idly pulling a rose to pieces.

She was wondering just how far this wooing had gone, and what had been the result of it.

"Rachel seems wonderfully favored," she said, presently, forcing a light laugh. "It would astonish you to learn how many are bowing at her shrine."

"Indeed!" he answered, coldly.

"Yes. Mr. Dent is quite infatuated. He follows her like a shadow. And even papa Heathcliff thinks her incomparable."

She paused for a reply, but as none came, she added:

"You are as familiar as I am with the events of that night when she met the stranger in the garden. Of course he was a lover. I wonder, Dr. Tremaine," lifting her eyes with an arch, penetrating glance, "if you will not be the next victim."

He smiled and shrugged.

"Forewarned is forearmed, Miss Atherton."

She bit her lip. This was scarcely the answer she had expected.

"I hope you don't think I am warning you against Miss Clyde?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, no," with another shrug, that puzzled her more than the first had done.

"It was only an unlucky jest. Forget it. I admire Rachel quite as much as anybody else does."

Then she changed the subject abruptly, and fell to talking of other things. But Dr. Tremaine did not linger many minutes. Though a woman of rare beauty and fascination, she had not the power to hold him at her side.

She felt this, and stood, fairly livid with rage, by the hall window, watching his departure.

"Has it come to this?" she hissed, through her close-set teeth. "Have I really given my heart, with all its richness of affection, unsought, unwelcome?"

It was a terrible reflection for the haughty beauty.

Suddenly a step stirred beside her. Looking round, she met Mr. Dent's thin, sneering face bent close to her own.

"It isn't pleasant to love, and love in vain," he said, smiling disagreeably.

She retreated a step or two, flashing him a haughty glance.

"Do you speak from your own experience, Mr. Dent?"

"Perhaps," he answered, biting an angry lip. "Let us condole with each other."

"Excuse me, I have no occasion."

He laughed aloud.

"Excuse me, Miss Atherton; but I happen to know better."

"Sir!" she cried, with a stamp, and gleaming eyes.

He stood before her quite still, but with a cruel smile upon his lips. He seemed nowise daunted by her anger.

"Compose yourself, my dear. It is not of the slightest use to fall into a passion with me."

She gasped for breath. "Insolent!" she exclaimed. "How dare you? I shall tell papa Heathcliff. He will order you from the house."

"Take my advice and speak to your mother in the first place. I will leave Fairlawn any moment that she sees fit to dismiss me."

His coolness exasperated her. It was the coolness of conscious power. And there was something alarming in his words themselves. She had half suspected that he had some

hold upon her mother. Now she was sure of it.

She tried to compose herself; but her face was white, and she trembled a little. It seemed terrible to be at the mercy of this coarse, cruel man.

"Tell me what you mean by following me here?" she demanded.

His eyes fixed themselves upon her face in sharp, close scrutiny.

"To condole with you. I knew the state of your affections; and I wished to give you an assurance."

"What assurance?"

"Dr. Tremaine will never marry Rachel Clyde."

She started; to her wild stare he replied with a low laugh.

"Who is to prevent it?" she asked.

"I am."

"How?"

"That is my secret. Ask me no questions. You will know soon enough. Only be assured that I have spoken well."

He turned slowly, moved to a little distance, and then came back again.

"Where is Rachel?" he demanded.

"She went up-stairs, I think."

"Could you send her to me?"

"I doubt if she would come."

"True."

He looked down at her, frowning darkly. At last he burst into a hoarse laugh.

"Rachel has a will of her own," he muttered. "No matter. I admire a woman of spirit. I can bide my time."

Grace shivered with a chill, but finally found voice to ask:

"What will you do?"

"Marry the girl myself, and so take her out of harm's way for good."

He rubbed the palms of his hands together, chuckling softly to himself, as he said this. Grace felt the very blood in her veins run cold, he looked so dark, stern, diabolical—a very Lucifer.

His presence made her nervous. She could endure it no longer. Turning she fled swiftly up the stairs.

"Heaven pity poor Rachel if she falls into that man's clutches," she murmured, her heart melting in momentary pity.

CHAPTER X.

A DREAD ALTERNATIVE.

MR. EDWARD DENT did not seem to rest well that night—or, rather, he did not rest at all.

After the lamps were lighted he haunted the parlors, wandering through them like some perturbed spirit doomed to linger on the spot where its transgressions would continually present themselves in the most hideous aspect.

He sought Mrs. Heathcliff for a brief interview, in the library, and when that was ended went back to his old promenade through the richly-furnished apartments.

Eleven o'clock found him smoking a cigar on the veranda. By this time the house was still. Nearly everybody had retired, for they kept early hours at Fairlawn.

Suddenly the hall door was softly opened, and a dark figure crept noiselessly toward the terrace steps. Mr. Dent quickly extinguished his cigar, and leaned further back in the shadow, fervently praying that the smell of the smoke might not betray his proximity.

A dark, sinister smile was on his lip, for he had recognized the figure at a glance.

"And so my dainty Rachel takes midnight rambles," he muttered. "It does not surprise me."

Then, with the ferocious eagerness of a puma, he slid into the purple gloom of the roses, syringas and rhododendrons, and stealthily followed that softly-gliding figure.

Toward the lower end of the garden Rachel made her way, and Mr. Dent, stealing along in the shadows and perfumed gloom, never once lost sight of her.

At last she paused near a wicket. It was flung eagerly open, and a young man caught her in his arms, and covered her lips with kisses.

"My darling," he cried, "I am so glad you have come."

"Are you?" muttered Mr. Edward Dent, glaring ferociously upon the pair from his hiding-place. "And I'm glad you've come, my precious young rascal, for I have an account to settle with you."

He made no attempt to approach any nearer, but seemed content to cower there and watch them. They talked for a long time, very earnestly. Rachel seemed to be pleading with her companion, but only an occasional word reached the ears of the watcher.

He heard enough, however, to know that Rachel feared for the young man's safety, and was urging him to leave the neighborhood as quickly as possible.

At last the interview ended. There was a long embrace, a kiss, a choking down of sobs, and the pair parted.

Rachel crept feebly toward the house, all unconscious of the eyes that were upon her—the footsteps that kept time to her own. She lifted the latch, and went slowly into the hall.

A dim light was burning there. She paused a moment, holding fast to the oaken balusters, so overcome that she could go no further. Her strength seemed utterly to have left her.

She heard the door softly open and close again—the hall door by which she had just entered. She did not turn or look back, but the sound went straight to her heart. She stood as if transfixed, frozen to the spot with an awful terror.

A muffled step approached.

"Rachel!" whispered a hoarse voice that she knew only too well.

She rallied sufficiently to raise her eyes. Edward Dent was standing beside her, with his sneering face bent toward her own.

She did not shriek or cry out. The extremity of terror that possessed her was too great for that. But she stood glaring at him with great, wide-open eyes full of dumb agony and appeal.

It needed no word of his to tell her that he had witnessed the interview in the garden. She seemed to know instinctively the calamity that had befallen her.

"Rachel," he whispered, bending over her—and he looked like some demon in the uncertain light, with his gleaming eyes, his darkly-villainous face, and great, hulking, ungainly figure—"Rachel, you see how helpless you are, and you know my power. Let me warn you to take care."

She shivered, struggled a moment with herself, and at last found voice.

"Don't touch me," she moaned. "For God's sake, don't touch me."

He laughed low and mockingly.

"Poor fool. As if there were contamination in my touch. Misfortunes a thousand times worse might happen to you."

The words seemed to rouse her a little. She straightened up, gasping for breath.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I have come to no decision."

"You will not harm him? You dare not!"

She seemed to forget her fear and aversion for a moment. Turning, she clung to his arm, and looked up eagerly into his cruel face.

His arm slid about her waist in a half-caress.

"Rachel," he cried, thickly, "how beautiful you are! But you were never more fascinating than you are to-night."

She flung off his arm, and shrunk away from him, moaning piteously.

"Don't trifle with me. I am not strong. I cannot bear it. For God's sake have a little mercy."

The appeal did not touch him. He stood staring at her with gloating eyes. She was in his toils, this sweet, marvelously-beautiful young girl. He knew the metal of which she was made—nothing short of a miracle could save her from him.

"You asked me just now what I was going

to do," he said, after a pause. "That will depend wholly upon yourself."

"Upon me?"

"Yes. Listen. I am not an impressible man, in general. But your beauty went straight to my heart. I loved you the first time I saw you. I am not handsome and cultured like Dr. Tremaine. But a heart quite as passionate as his throbs in my bosom."

He paused a moment, gave her a swift glance, and then went on:

"That heart is filled with your image, Rachel. I have longed to tell you so before, but you never gave me the opportunity. You would not see me to-day. You have been very cruel."

He seemed to wait for a reply of some sort. The girl turned her white, haggard face away from him. She reeled giddily, no longer able to support herself.

He brought a chair, seated her in it, and then resumed:

"I love you too well to give you up—better than I had deemed it possible to love any woman. You have come between me and ambition—duty. But I fling them both to the winds, and cling only to you. I would make any sacrifice for your sake—any save to give you up. Test me."

A strong, deep shudder was her only answer. She must have known what he meant, but would not speak.

"That man you met in the grounds, just now," he said, breaking the silence that fell. "Has he told you what I know of him?"

She nodded her head.

"He told me to-night. I did not know before."

"You knew he was in trouble of some sort?"

"I did."

She seemed to be choking with suppressed sobs for a moment. Growing calmer, at last, she added:

"He has no secrets from me—the brave, true fellow. But I did not know until to-night that you were mixed up in his affairs."

"Humph!" A crafty smile curled his thin lip. "I think we can now arrive at an understanding, Miss Rachel. That man is in my power, and you know it. I could place him within the walls of a prison before to-morrow's sun shall set."

"But you will not," she cried, falling on her knees at his feet. "For God's sake promise me you will not."

"His fate is in your hands."

"In mine? Then he shall live—live!"

Her voice arose to a hysterical shriek. She burst into a passionate flood of tears, that shook her whole body.

"What would you do for him?" demanded Mr. Dent's cold voice.

"I would give my own life for his."

"It is not a life I ask. You can save him in one way—only one."

To her wild stare he replied with a wicked laugh.

"You do not understand me, Rachel. Let me speak more plainly. If you wish to save that man, you must become my wife."

"Never!" she cried, reeling in her chair, as if from a blow.

"Very well," he replied, with the same fixed smile. "His blood be upon your head!"

"You can save him, and you will not. Oh, monster!"

"It is you who must make the sacrifice—not I."

"He would scorn to accept it."

"You must not leave him to choose."

She clasped her fingers over her temples; she felt as if she must be going mad.

"Will nothing else satisfy you?"

"Nothing."

"I have friends here who will help me to save him."

"They cannot," he sneered. "His fate lies in my hands—and yours. Ask him. He will tell you so."

She sat for a moment as if stunned. She

looked a ghost. All the bright, rich color had vanished from her face, leaving it whiter than marble.

At last she arose, feebly; she moved again to the staircase, slowly and with difficulty, as if she had suddenly grown old.

"I am helpless," she said. "For his sake I must be your victim. But I warn you to desist. I shall hate you—hate you with a bitterer hatred than that I cherish now."

He changed color at the words, and the look she gave him.

"I know you do not care for me, Rachel. Your affections are wrapped up in another. But time will work a change. You will learn to think of me as you ought."

"Never!"

"But you promise to become my wife?" he demanded, fiercely.

"I promise."

She could say no more. Even these words were scarcely articulate. She glided, ghost-like, up the stairs, and the darkness shut her in.

Left alone, Mr. Dent took a hasty turn up and down the dimly-lighted hall.

"She is mine—mine!" he muttered, a smile of triumph mingling in the dark villainy of his countenance.

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE WOMAN'S VOW.

TEN o'clock had struck before Rachel came down-stairs the next morning.

She was missed from the breakfast-table, and Mrs. Heathcliff sent up a solicitous message. Mr. Dent, who occupied his usual place, smiled slightly to himself at his hostess' well-feigned concern, and sat, with his eyes fixed upon his plate, until the servant had withdrawn. Then he said:

"I beg you will not alarm yourself about Miss Clyde. She will do very well without her breakfast. Engaged young ladies are not proverbial for the voracity of their appetites."

"Instantly two pairs of eyes were fixed upon his face. A sudden fire flashed into Grace's dark orbs; but Mrs. Heathcliff could only stare her amazement.

"What mean you?" she cried.

Still smiling, still wonderfully self-composed, he made answer:

"You must have seen the turn affairs were taking. Surely I need not speak more plainly?"

"You must speak plainly if you expect me to understand you at all."

"Eh?" shrugging his shoulders, whimsically. "I hoped you would spare me the ordeal of confession. In two words, then, Rachel Clyde has promised to marry me!"

Mrs. Heathcliff gave a sudden start, and her face flushed crimson.

"Promised to marry you?" she echoed.

"Yes. Break the news to Colonel Heathcliff, if you please. I am in no mood to confront him."

He rose, abruptly, as he spoke, and crossed to the window, where he stood, idly drumming on the pane.

A brief interval passed. Grace left the room; then Mrs. Heathcliff glided up to Mr. Dent, and dropped her jeweled hand on his shoulder.

"Edward," she whispered, in a hoarse voice, "you have succeeded beyond my expectations, if you have really wrung from Rachel a promise to become your wife."

"Bah!" he sneered. "Do you think I am trifling with you?"

"No; you would not dare?"

"Perhaps not."

"I know you would not. Tell me how you have accomplished your object."

"Excuse me," he answered, bobbing and grinning. "If you were to find the philosopher's stone, would you babble the secret to everybody you met?"

She bit the blood from her lip, but was silent. It were not well to anger him.

"Go now," he added, "and face the dragon for me. You know I am not particularly fond of your delectable husband. This marriage must be pushed as rapidly as possible."

"Yes."

"And you must help me push it."

He shot her a swift glance. She changed color, slightly, but replied:

"Of course you can depend upon my influence."

Speaking thus, she turned, and slowly glided from the room.

When Rachel made her appearance at ten o'clock, she went directly to Colonel Heathcliff's apartment. In the great horror that had so suddenly risen to confront her, she longed to tell him, and throw herself upon his compassion.

She could not see how he could help her. The case was entirely beyond his surgery. But she felt that his sympathy would be very sweet.

He was sitting in an easy-chair by the window, very pale, very languid, but surely recovering from his illness. He looked up, as she entered, and a sad smile curved his handsome lips.

"My poor child," he murmured, and indicated a stool at her feet.

She took it, trembling all over. Oh, how could she tell him all the pain and anguish she was enduring? How could she force a confession to her reluctant lips?

For some seconds not a word was spoken. At last her eyes crept up to his; she read something strange, piercing, eager in the glance he gave her.

"You know it all," she cried out, sharply.

"Some one has told you?"

He gently stroked her hair.

"Some one has told me a very singular story, Rachel. But I will not believe it."

She shuddered, hid her face, and exclaimed:

"It is true—oh, my God!—it is true!"

"You are going to marry Edward Dent?"

"I have given him my promise."

This was all the poor, quivering lips could utter. Even these words were scarcely articulate.

Colonel Heathcliff saw the frightful pallor that was on her face. He saw her tremble and writhe with anguish, and it maddened him.

"You shall never marry that man!" he cried, fiercely, rising in his chair. "The dark-browed villain! I know you do not love him."

"No, no, no!"

"Then you shall not be his victim! I will stand between you myself. What do you know of him? Nothing. He is old enough to be your father!"

Rachel sprung forward, clinging to his arm with a wild, wild sob.

"Oh, save me!" she implored.

"I will. I love you as though you were my own daughter. Let me exercise a father's authority."

He kissed her forehead, wiped the hot tears from her cheeks, then gently pushed her from him.

"What would you do?" she cried out, suddenly, for he had moved from his chair and was reaching for the bell-rope.

"Send for Mr. Dent, and tell him here, in your presence, that you will not be permitted to keep a promise forced from you."

"Oh, no, no! You must not do that!"

She caught his hand, dragging it down again. For a moment she had forgotten everything else in the sweet solace of his sympathy. But this movement on his part brought her to her senses.

"It cannot be helped," she moaned. "I have pledged my word. It must be kept, at whatever cost."

"That is a foolish scruple. Let me ring."

"No, no, no," she cried, so earnestly that he desisted, and sunk back wearily in the chair from which he had risen.

"I don't like that man," he muttered. "He is full of low cunning and trickery. Oh, Ra-

chel, you must not go on with this wicked farce!"

She closed her eyes for a moment, drawing back with such a white, set face that he feared she would faint.

"I am very unhappy," she said, speaking in a low, hoarse whisper. "It would be a mercy if I could die this moment."

"Oh, Rachel!"

"It would," she went on, wearily. "You do not know the whole truth. There are reasons why I must marry Edward Dent. There is no escape for me. I know it—I feel it. You can only pity me. All the rest lies with God."

"Reasons?" he echoed, catching eagerly at that single word.

She bowed her head.

"I was sure of it! It all seems very strange and horrible. I knew there must be some mystery. Tell me all about it, my child."

He spoke so kindly, so very gently that she must have yielded had not the door been thrust open abruptly at this instant.

It was Madame Gale who entered. Her dark face seemed convulsed. Her eyes were full of fire, and a red spot flamed in either cheek.

"Rachel," she cried out sharply, "I want you."

She shot Colonel Heathcliff a swift glance in passing, then caught the girl's hand, and dragged her into the hall outside the door.

"What is this I hear?" she then demanded, imperiously. "Tell me at once, child. Have you pledged yourself to this stranger, to this wretch who calls himself Edward Dent?"

Rachel bent her head, and answered:

"I have."

Madame gave a sharp little cry. It was full of anger and fury.

"This is Pauline's work! She has some object to accomplish. She is forcing you to wed that man!"

"No," answered Rachel, "Mrs. Heathcliff has nothing to do with it. I have made my own choice."

"Faugh!" looking at her with a black, witch-like stare. "Do you think to deceive me? Would you make me believe you love that villain?"

"I must marry him."

"Fool!" shrieked madame, shaking her fist wildly in the air.

She suddenly grew calm again. Her stern face softened. Perhaps the anguish expressed in the abject attitude and burning eyes of the young girl had touched her heart. At any rate she stooped suddenly and kissed her cheek.

"My child," she said, in a low voice, looking all around, "I have been a stern, hard guardian. You have never found me sympathetic or generous. You have been wronged and ill-used from first to last. But, as God hears me, I have loved you through it all, and I love you now."

She gasped, hesitated. Rachel drew back a little, staring hard at her. She was startled. She saw a change in Madame Gale, but knew not what to make of it. For the moment it brought no relief—only increased her distress.

"I've made up my mind to stand by you," madame went on, in that same odd way, and with that same odd expression upon her features. "It was a struggle, but I cannot see you suffer. Whoever seeks to harm you hereafter will have to answer to me."

CHAPTER XII.

TRYING TO SEE IN THE DARK.

MADAME'S lips closed together sharply. She stood quite silent, eying Rachel with a meaning scowl that had something of real kindness behind it.

The girl's face flushed suddenly. In spite of the misery she was in, hope awakened into new life in her bosom—she scarcely knew why.

"Oh," she cried, "I am sure you can help me if anybody can! You will—promise me you will!"

"Bah! Have I not promised already?"

She knitted her brows, and stood rubbing her yellow hands together. She was evidently at a loss.

"Why do you think I can help you?" she demanded, presently.

"Because—because—"

"Because what, you silly child?"

Rachel gathered courage, and finally went on, incoherently:

"It has just occurred to me! Perhaps I cannot make you comprehend. But there is some mystery. You, Madame Gale, are mixed up in it. So is Mrs. Heathcliff. You both know something of me which you are unwilling to tell."

Madame laughed shrilly, and said:

"Go on."

"There is some secret understanding between Mrs. Heathcliff and Mr. Dent. Don't stare and shake your head; I know there is. You may be mixed up in that mystery, too. I don't know—things are terribly jangled. But if you are, I am sure you can set everything right, somehow, so that I will not be compelled to marry that dreadful man."

She paused to take breath. Her eager eyes were upon madame's face. She seemed to be trying to read her through and through.

"It's all a mistake," said madame, dryly. "I don't know anything about Mr. Dent. You're a cunning little thing, but this time you have made a mistake. You have, indeed."

Rachel clasped her fingers over her temples.

"Then I am lost!" she moaned, leaning heavily against the wall.

Madame stood scowling and thinking. At last she moved a little and laid her great hand upon the back of Rachel.

"Tell me why you are going to marry Mr. Dent," she said.

The girl writhed, hesitated, and glanced fearfully up and down the passage. Finally she whispered a few words close to madame's ear.

They must have been startling words, for the witch-like old woman recoiled sharply.

"Just Heaven!" she cried, "is he here?"

"Hush!" whispered Rachel, warningly. "You will not betray him! Oh, I know you dare not."

"No, I shall not betray him."

There followed a brief silence. Madame broke it.

"And so it is to save him that you have promised to marry Mr. Dent?"

"Yes."

"Humph!" she grunted, with a grimace. "What a precious fool you are! I never dreamed of that."

Then she added:

"I begin to understand this Mr. Dent a little better. Pauline is a hypocrite. She should have told me; but she did not. Bah! it is no longer necessary."

Rachel tried to speak, but could not. She was quivering all over. So much—so very much—depended upon that interview.

"Have you no more to say to me?" demanded madame, after a pause.

She gasped four words in reply:

"Can—you—save—me?"

Madame knitted her brows again, frowning a little, and finally made answer:

"I don't know. I'm sorry he—you know whom I mean—is mixed up in this affair. But you would not desert him even to save yourself—don't take the trouble to shake your head—I know without that you would not."

Then, eying Rachel sternly all round, she demanded:

"Why has he not shown himself to me?"

"Perhaps he was afraid to do so."

"Humph!" grunted madame. "No matter. Now go, child. I will do what I can for you. And you must try to trust me more fully than you have done before."

Though strangely sick at heart, Rachel tried to nod assent, but her stubborn head scarcely moved at all.

Madame grinned, turned sharply, and swept

rustling into the apartment where Colonel Heathcliff was sitting.

Rachel moved slowly down the passage. When she reached the main hall, everything seemed to blur before her eyes, of a sudden. Her limbs tottered, and there was a ringing in her ears. She pushed open the nearest door, and staggered to a seat.

It was the library she had entered. A figure rose up from the obscurity of the remote portion of the apartment. Rachel heard a quick, firm step, and struggled hard with the deathly lethargy that seemed to be stealing away her senses. She looked up.

Dr. Tremaine was coming toward her, almost as pallid and agitated as herself.

His sudden appearance was like a shock. It aroused her from the faintness and stupor that had beset her.

"What has happened?" he cried, pausing at her side, and speaking in a low, deep tone that thrilled her strangely.

"Nothing," she stammered.

"You are ill," he persisted.

"No, no. It was a sudden faintness. See, I am better now."

The color was coming back to her cheeks, the light to her eyes. The mere enchantment of his presence had wrought the change.

"Yes," he murmured, "you are growing more like yourself again."

He hesitated, with his eyes fixed eagerly upon her face. A torrent of words seemed to choke his utterance. Giving way to them at last, he cried out, sharply:

"Oh, Rachel, I cannot give you up. I cannot keep away from you! Something more powerful than my own will draws me to your side. I know it is wrong and wicked. I know I am weak, foolish, beside myself! But you will bear with me, and let my great love plead my excuse?"

Rachel turned away her face at those burning words, pained, startled, grieved.

"Oh, hush, hush!" she moaned.

"Do I only add to the burden you carry?" he asked, reproachfully. "It is hard—it is very hard. I would die for you."

"Hush!" she whispered again, in a heart-broken voice.

"Will you not listen? God help me! Do you know I gathered hope from your manner when last we met. I thought my fears might all have been groundless, and you were free to return my love."

She clasped her hands and a slight moan escaped her lips.

"Was I wrong?" he pleaded, passionately.

"I must know. Was I wrong in thinking you might learn to love me?"

"I cannot be your wife," she answered.

He caught his breath sharply. An expression of blank dismay settled upon his face.

"Forgive me," he said.

The hopeless resignation of his tone went straight to her heart. She threw out her hands feebly.

"Don't misunderstand me," she cried.

"There is a barrier between us that neither you nor I can surmount. God be merciful to us both!"

He caught her hand, drew it to his lips and covered it with impetuous kisses.

"If that barrier is not love for another, I will surmount it," he exclaimed, eyes and face all aflame.

Rachel sighed drearily.

"It is my promise to another, Dr. Tremaine."

He started, growing pale again. He thought of that night in the garden, when he had seen her clasped close to another man's heart. What did it all mean? What was this mystery? Was she playing with him—leading him on while her affections were bound up in another?

"A promise?" he repeated, hoarsely. "Have you promised to wed another?"

She bowed her head.

"But you do not love him? I have a right to know. You do not love him?"

"What matters it?" she answered, hiding

her white, haggard face. "Nothing but death can release me from my vow. Go, go! You are driving me mad. I cannot endure this scene."

The sharp anguish of this appeal would not let him linger. He dropped a hot kiss upon her bowed head, then turned and went slowly from the room.

Like one in a dream he staggered out into the sunshine and the open air. A white dress came fluttering toward him, gliding through the shrubbery.

It was Grace Atherton. She gained his side, and her hand fell gently as a snowflake upon his arm. Her eyes were full of soft and subtle pity.

"Going away?" she cried, reproachfully. "I am so sorry I did not know you were here. Did you find anybody to entertain you?"

"Miss Clyde," he answered.

She gave a perceptible start.

And so you saw Rachel? I am glad of that. Of course she told you the news?"

"What news?"

Grace forced a laugh, and returned, in a careless tone:

"She is to marry Mr. Dent."

"Mr. Dent?"

Dr. Tremaine recoiled as if he had been struck. His face grew ghastly.

"I don't think I understand you," he said, harshly.

"You did. I said Rachel was going to marry Mr. Dent."

"Impossible!" He gasped out the word, while his brow grew dark and lowering.

"It is too true," murmured Grace. "I would not have believed it. But she makes no secret of her intentions. I can't understand it."

No more could Dr. Tremaine. He stood quite still, growing hot and cold by turns. He felt angry, hurt, humiliated.

He had only thought of the mysterious stranger. It had never once occurred to him that it was Mr. Dent to whom her word was plighted.

Why was it? Why had she given herself up to the man she feared and hated?

"It is very odd," he said, with a ghastly smile.

"Very. He is so old, so coarse, so vulgar, so unsuited in every way. It must be a powerful motive that induced her to betroth herself to him."

She gave him a swift glance and went on:

"I have not forgotten the discovery we made in the garden that night. I was sure the man Rachel met then was her lover. I think so still. But circumstances have compelled her to give him up, and accept Mr. Dent."

"Doubtlessly you are right."

The words fell slowly from his lips. He was smiling his best. But it was a strange, forced smile in which pain, mortification and scorn were all mingled.

"I hope she will be happy," said Grace, sweetly. "But I do not see how that is possible."

Her soft glance, so full of magnetism and subtle sympathy was upon Dr. Tremaine's face. Her scented breath fanned his cheek. She stood beside him, bright, beautiful, gentle, womanly, all—to outward seeming—that man could ask to make the sum of earthly happiness.

Her graceful figure was slightly inclined toward him. Was it imagination—or did her lovely face express an emotion stronger and deeper than sympathy?

Man-like, he accepted the incense so cunningly offered. He caught her hand almost fiercely to his lips and cried out:

"God bless you! You, at least, are good and true!"

Then he swung swiftly on his heel and strode away. Grace stood watching him, her cheeks dyed with blushes and her heart throbbing fiercely.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOR HIS SAKE.

A few gloomy days went by.

Rachel was walking in the shrubbery one morning. She did not often go there now; but the close air of the house had seemed to stifle her. So she had stolen forth.

How lovely everything looked in this grand domain of Nature! Grasses, flowers and blossoming shrubs were decked with dew-drops, as if some lavish hand had been sprinkling diamonds upon them in the still hours of the night. All the air was odorous. It was a peaceful, sweetly-serene picture upon which the midsummer sunlight lay warm and yellow.

Rachel sighed softly to herself as she gazed around. It seemed hard that one must endure such unhappiness as had fallen to her lot when all earth was full of so much beauty and serenity.

Her sky had not brightened. She saw no hope in the future, no happiness in the present. Mr. Dent was inexorable. Who could help her? Not Colonel Heathcliff—in spite of his pleading looks she dared not tell him the whole truth in respect to her situation. Not Mrs. Heathcliff or Grace—they seemed almost to gloat over her wretchedness. Not Dr. Tremaine—he had mistaken and misapprehended her in a manner that made her burden doubly hard to bear.

Who then? Madame Gale? Perhaps, but not probable. It seemed like leaning upon a broken reed. What could madame do, after all?

At this point in her reflections she turned a sudden bend in the path she was traversing, and came face to face with Mr. Dent.

He had evidently followed her into the garden. She grew cold at sight of him; but, rallying her drooping spirits, she stepped quickly forward and sought to pass him.

He raised his hand, either in entreaty or menace. Rachel recoiled, stood stock still, and stared at him wildly, her heart beating very fast.

"Did you think to run away from me?" he demanded.

She made no answer. But her white, startled countenance, upon which fear and repulsion were plainly written, told its own story.

Mr. Dent was not so blind but that he read it. A frown knitted his heavy brows. He seemed to struggle with himself a moment.

"You may hate me," he said, at last, in a low, deep voice, "but you can't utterly despise me. My love makes me almost as noble as yourself. You will see it so, some day, when you grow more reconciled to the inevitable."

"I shall never be reconciled."

A sneer curled his lip.

"You don't know yourself, beautiful creature," he made answer. "No woman under the heavens could long remain indifferent to a man's abiding, idolatrous love."

Her spirit kindled at the words.

"You have made a great mistake," she said, her eyes flashing fire. "Woman's love is not to be bought, sold or coerced. No strength of passion could awaken a response in my heart toward a man I despised."

"You do not know that."

"I do know it!" she persisted. "And I hope you will take warning in time. My present abhorrence is nothing compared to what I should feel if compelled to take my place beside you as your wife."

A dark flush crossed his face and then receded, leaving him frightfully pale.

"Take care!" he whispered, in a hoarse voice. "Don't provoke me too far. Even you might repent it, for I could not answer for the result."

She would not continue the subject, but turned from him haughtily and said:

"Let me pass. Why have you followed me here?"

"Why? Because I have something to say

to you that could not so well be said in the house."

"If I must listen—go on."

He drew nearer, and would have taken her hand had she permitted it.

"I know you have not forgotten the terms of our bargain, Rachel. In consideration of your hand in marriage—a certain person who shall be nameless goes scot free and I do not use the information I hold against him—information, by the way, that would lodge him in the nearest prison."

"Hush!" cried the poor girl, clasping her fingers over her temples. "Oh, hush!"

"Humph. Don't be frightened, my dear. If I refuse to act nothing can be done against the person in question."

"Don't speak of him at all. Please don't," she entreated, with an apprehensive glance all round.

"Good. I have no wish to do so," and a cool smile of triumph curled his lip. "I have a more agreeable subject to broach. It is the wedding-day. When is it to be?"

She started up from her crouching attitude at the question, agitated, and very white.

"I—I—don't know," she stammered. "In one or two years, perhaps."

"One or two years?" he echoed. "Bah! It shall be within as many weeks."

"Oh, no, no!" screamed Rachel, staring at him wildly again. "You don't mean it? You would not be so cruel? It can't be—oh, it can't be."

"It can—and must!" he made answer, with a shrug. "Am I to be kept waiting forever for my happiness? No. It is for *me* to decide in this matter, and I have decided."

"How?"

Her voice was sharp and clear. It sounded horribly, even to herself.

"We will be married two weeks from this day."

Her fictitious strength deserted her in an instant. She fell at his feet, weeping, moaning and wringing her hands.

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried. "I cannot. Give me time. You *must* give me time. It is so soon. Oh, for the love of heaven, have a little pity."

He lifted her up, and tried to soothe her in his rough way. But he did not relent. The expression on his pale, inexorable face underwent no change.

"Calm yourself," he said. "It would not help you, even if I were to yield to your wishes. You must marry me finally. Why seek to put it off? Think of *him*! He can tread the earth a free man from the day that sees you mine!"

"You are not deceiving me?"

"No, no."

"Then I can do anything—suffer anything—for *his* sake!"

The words were spoken in a shrill scream. Her strength seemed to return, for she sprung clear of the man's loathsome embrace, of a sudden, and fled wildly up the path.

Gazing after her, Mr. Dent muttered, softly:

"Two weeks! two short weeks! I care not how soon they pass, for then, then, she will be mine!"

A little later Rachel sat in her private room at Fairlawn, with her face hidden in her trembling hands, thinking:

"It is all over. I am doomed. Nobody can save me—for I will *never* prove false to *him*! Oh, may God be merciful and grant me a short life! If I could only die upon my wedding-day!"

Then she burst into a passion of hysterical sobs. It seemed as if her heart would break in the storm of grief and despair that wrung her frame.

Her trials for that day were not ended. Mr. Dent managed to let everybody in the house know that the wedding-day had been appointed, using the same ready cunning with which he had made public the engagement.

As a natural result, Rachel met curious looks when she made her appearance at a late hour of the afternoon. Mrs. Heathcliff seem-

ed pleased; she was very gracious; very low-voiced and tender. Grace's face was flushed, and she appeared restless and excited. The colonel was grave, sad and troubled, but he made no allusion to what had just transpired.

Dr. Tremaine was at Fairlawn that evening. Rachel met him for a moment as she was returning from Colonel Heathcliff's room where she had been reading to the invalid. He happened to be crossing the hall at the same moment. They were brought face to face.

It was a trying moment for both. Rachel caught her breath sharply, passed one hand over her heart to still its fearful beating, then nerved herself for the ordeal before her.

She saw Dr. Tremaine start, change color, swing away from her, and then turn quickly back again.

"I have heard the news," he said, holding out his hand, with the ghost of a smile. "I ought to offer my well-wishes."

She did not take his hand; she did not *shake*. She could not.

"I don't think you have been quite frank with me," he went on, after a pause. "At any rate, I have been woefully deceived. I do not reproach you. It was none of my business, perhaps."

He waited, looked at her fixedly, but still she was silent.

"I hope you will be happy, Rachel. But I have my fears. If you are marrying Mr. Dent for his money, may God forgive you—I never can!"

His voice choked with that last word. He had meant to say more. Turning abruptly on his heel, he slowly left her.

With her white, haggard face turned upward, the wretched girl prayed:

"Gracious Father, be merciful! This cup is more than I can bear!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STRANGE WOMAN.

MRS. HEATHCLIFF and Madame Gale had been walking along one of the shaded lanes in the vicinity of Fairlawn. Both ladies looked flushed and excited.

They had been quarreling. Of course it was about Rachel Clyde that they disagreed. Madame insisted that the marriage should not be permitted to take place—that Mrs. Heathcliff could prevent it, and it was her duty to do so.

Mrs. Heathcliff, on her part, denied having any influence in the matter. Mr. Dent could do as he pleased—and so could Rachel, for that matter, and since they were determined to marry, why should she interfere? It was manifestly their own business.

At a turn in the lane the two ladies separated. They could come to no understanding. Nothing was left them but to consider the matter more fully before taking any action.

Each was bent on having her own way, however, and, unfortunately, their ways pointed to very different results.

Madame Gale walked on by herself a few steps, with her eyes bent down. She was scowling darkly. She was really quite angry and out of all patience with Mrs. Heathcliff.

"I've sacrificed so much to that woman," she muttered, showing her yellow teeth half-venomously. "It seems hard to find her so ungrateful. I wash my hands of her affairs. Poor Rachel shall not be made unhappy, let what will come of it."

Striding along fiercely, with both hands swinging at her side, and her funny little brow contracted, she stopped suddenly, without any apparent object and looked back.

Mrs. Heathcliff was standing near the curve where she had left her. Her attitude was dejected and downcast.

This was not all Madame saw. Her sharp eyes took in a second figure—the figure of a woman, odd, outlandish, *outré*, that was slowly moving down the lane as if anxious to speak to Mrs. Heathcliff.

Madame was apt to have sudden convic-

tions. She had one now—a conviction that this odd, somewhat ghastly woman would be mixed up more or less intimately with all their histories.

What could she have to say to Mrs. Heathcliff?

Madame determined to find out. There was a break in the hedge close by the place where she was standing. She stepped into it, doubled back on her own footsteps, and walked rapidly to the curve where she had left Mrs. Heathcliff.

The strange woman reached the curve in the lane at about the same moment. There was only the hedge-row between Madame and the other two women. But, fortunately, it happened to be a thick hedge, and screened her effectually.

The woman did not appear to be troubled with any superfluous modesty. The instant she paused in the shaded lane, she said, in a gruff, masculine voice:

"You are Mrs. Heathcliff?"

"Yes."

Madame Gale heard the lady in question reply, coldly and distantly.

"Let's walk on together, ma'am. I've got something to say to you."

"Thank you," was the haughty answer.

"May I trouble you to say it here?"

The woman seemed somewhat disturbed by this rebuff. She gave an angry snort, and muttered something sharply to herself.

"Very well, ma'am," she said, aloud, after a pause. "It concerns Mr. Dent."

Her voice had a curious inflection as she spoke that name. To Madame Gale, crouched there behind the hedge-row, it sounded so strange and horribly that a quick shudder ran all over her.

"Ah!" murmured Mrs. Heathcliff.

"Yes, ma'am. I want to see that man. And I'd like to see him without being seen myself. I believe I used to know him."

Then she laughed—a hoarse, gruff laugh scarcely pleasant to hear.

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Heathcliff, superciliously. "I'm sure I shall not prevent you from seeing him."

"Won't you help me, ma'am?"

"Excuse me. I don't see how I well could. Good-morning."

With that she was off. The strange woman did not stir, but Madame heard her muttering and stamping her foot as if very much put out.

"Pauline thinks she is crazy," thought Madame. "I wonder if she is?"

Her resolve was soon taken. Pressing close to the hedge-row she said, in a friendly voice:

"My good woman, don't be frightened. Don't run away from me. I wish you well. And perhaps I can help you."

There was a muttered exclamation on the other side of the hedge, and then the woman said, sharply:

"Who are you?"

"A well-wisher."

"Why are you hiding there?"

"I was walking in these grounds. I overheard what you said by the merest accident."

You will see that Madame did not hesitate to tell white lies when the occasion demanded.

There was a grunt, a short laugh, and then the woman said:

"If you are a friend, come into the lane and show yourself."

"That I will. Wait for me."

Madame gathered up her dress, ran back to the gap in the hedge by which she had entered the grounds, and, three minutes later, confronted the strange woman in the lane.

A nearer view made her look odder and more whimsical than ever. She was very tall, clad in black, and, warm as was the weather, wore a huge cloak thrown over her shoulders.

She had iron-gray hair, a bleached, sallow skin and hollow jaws. She looked to be very old, but close observation showed that sick-

ness or trouble must have aged her more than years.

Her eyes were peculiar. They had a sharp, penetrating, almost cunning outlook, and a certain wild restlessness of expression that was suspicious, to say the least.

Madame had observed all this even before she said, with a courtesy, and a grim smile:

"I am here. Speak freely."

The woman gave her a sharp glance, and returned:

"Why should I speak to you at all?"

"Because I can tell you nearly as much of Mr. Dent as can Mrs. Heathcliff herself."

"Really?" she caught madame's hand and squeezed it hard. "You are not deceiving me?" she cried, eagerly.

"No."

"I believe you. I want a chance to watch this Mr. Dent a few moments, without his knowledge."

"So I heard you tell Mrs. Heathcliff."

"You will help me? You can help me? Oh, it would be so good and kind of you! You would be doing me a service, and him a service; and others of whom you do not dream, perhaps, a service."

She said this quite wildly. A feverish light shone in her eyes, and a hectic spot burned in either cheek.

"Why do you wish to see Mr. Dent?"

For answer she gave madame a cunning leer, and slowly shook her head.

"You will not tell me, when I have promised to help you? That is scarcely fair."

She remained silent a moment, dropped her head on her breast, and appeared to be ruminating.

"Answer me one question," she cried out, suddenly and sharply. "Is Mr. Dent going to be married?"

"Yes," answered madame, grimly.

The woman gave a gasp, grew ashy white, and slowly pressed her hand across her temples.

"Take me to him," she whispered huskily. "Take me to some spot where I can determine whether this is the man of whom I have come in search."

Madame's mind was already made up. It might be foolish—it might even be unwise—but she was determined the woman should have her wish gratified.

"Come with me," she said.

They set out together. The woman walked on silently for the most part. But, now and then, she would pause for a moment, mutter a few broken sentences to herself, with a very wild glitter in her eyes; then she would go on again.

Madame felt puzzled and a little frightened.

"She's mad—mad as a March hare," she muttered, grimacing and shuddering.

Still she had no thought of giving up her mission. They reached Fairlawn, and she led the way into the grounds by means of a little wicket, seldom used. She did not care to be seen in this woman's company, especially by Mrs. Heathcliff.

The lawn was deserted. Madame kept in the shadow of the shrubbery, and crept toward the house, pausing at last under cover of some vines and wild roses, half a dozen yards from the veranda.

"Mr. Dent usually comes here to smoke at this hour," she said. "Keep quiet, and you are sure to see him."

The words had scarcely left her lips ere Mr. Dent came sauntering along the veranda, with a cigar in his mouth.

The woman saw him, and gave a quick start, and a suppressed cry.

"It is—it is he!"

"Hush!" said madame, sternly. "He must not hear us."

She scarcely seemed to hear the words. She stood breathless, fixed as stone, her glaring eyes turned upon the man lounging there so unconscious of her maniacal gaze.

She looked like a dead woman. Her face was ghastly. A clammy sweat had broken over her head and features.

"It is—it is he!" she cried again.

Madame shook her angrily. She was now thoroughly frightened, and regretted what she had done.

"Come away," she whispered, sharply. "Come with me. You shall come."

The woman drew a long, gasping sigh. Half-leading, half-dragging her, madame managed to get her away from the house, and eventually to the little wicket by which they had entered the grounds.

"Now go your way," she said, scowling darkly. "I hope you are satisfied. At any rate, I wash my hands of you. Would I had done so sooner."

Turning, she walked rapidly away, the conviction growing stronger and stronger in her mind that the woman was mad.

CHAPTER XV.

JANE.

MR. DENT finished his cigar, and sauntered slowly toward the steps.

Just then Mrs. Heathcliff made her appearance at the hall-door. She called to him, and of course he went back to speak to her.

"I had only a word to say," she whispered, glancing sharply all round. "You are still determined to marry Rachel?"

"Determined?" he echoed, and burst into a hoarse laugh. "I love the girl almost to madness. Nothing has occurred to change my plans. Why do you ask?"

"You are likely to meet with opposition upon which I had not counted."

She referred to Madame Gale. But Mr. Dent did not know this; nor did he know what good and sufficient reasons she had for fearing madame's power.

So knitting his brow, angrily, he demanded: "What do you mean?"

"I cannot stop to explain," she answered, hurriedly. "I only wished to put you on your guard."

"Yes."

"Don't be persuaded to postpone the marriage, no matter how earnestly Rachel may urge it."

"Humph. I am not likely to do that."

"Your only safe way is to bring it to a speedy consummation."

She paused, glanced apprehensively around once more, and finally said, in a lower tone:

"I met a strange woman in the lane, this morning, who was asking for you."

He stared hard at her, changed color, and finally said:

"Who was she?"

"I don't know. I told you she was a stranger."

"You say she asked for me?"

"Yes."

"Did she make use of the name Dent?"

"She did."

He drew a quick breath of relief.

"Odd!" he muttered. "Who could it have been? She would not have known that name. It must have been some one else."

Then, looking up sharply, he said, aloud:

"Could you describe the woman?"

"Exactly."

She was about to do so when a rich voice was heard near at hand caroling a song, and a step crossed the hall.

"It is Grace," said Mrs. Heathcliff. "She is coming for me. Some other time I will describe the woman."

She hastily retreated. Mr. Dent stood scowling darkly for some minutes. Then he thoughtfully descended the steps.

He seemed to be troubled. He walked with his head drooped upon his breast. Now and then he kicked the loose pebbles out of his path with a savage impetus.

Curse it," he muttered, "what untoward fate has turned up, now? Something is wrong, I can feel it in my bones. That woman! Is it Jane? Impossible! How could she find me here, under another name? Ha, ha, ha! She has not wit enough for that. Poor fool!"

"Who is it, then? I must find out as speedily as possible. Heaven grant it is nobody to work me mischief. Sweet Rachel! bewitching Rachel! I would not give you up

now. The thought of possession is too delightful by far."

Smiling and smirking he walked on. He tried hard to banish every disagreeable thought. He meant to fill his whole heart and soul with delightful dreams of Rachel.

Bad, unprincipled, coarse as the man was, this love he felt for the young, innocent girl was genuine. It filled his whole being, and was likely, in time, to make him better and purer.

Unconscious what feet had trodden that way a few moments before him, he took the path leading down to the little wicket. Presently he paused in the shade of a fine old larch, to wipe his heated forehead.

"I've fought a good fight with the world and the devil," he muttered, between his close-set teeth. "I've waded through difficulties and discouragements that would have killed another man. And now, when love and peace offer themselves, am I to be balked of both?"

"No," he cried, stamping his foot in sudden frenzy. "I don't know who has dogged me to this place. But let them take care! It would be dangerous to cross my path, just now."

His fist was shaking wildly in air. Something dark, malignant, horrible had come into his evil face. His small, twinkling eyes shone like two balls of fire.

The gate clanged sharply. A shadow fell across his path. Looking up he saw the yellow old woman who had mystified Madame Gale so completely.

A muttered imprecation fell from his lips. His jaw dropped. He recoiled, ashen white, and stood staring breathlessly at the sudden apparition.

She returned his gaze, grinning horribly, the while, and stretching out one of her bleached and shriveled hands.

"Edward," she said, in a low, hoarse voice, "are you glad to see me?"

He struck down her hand, glaring at her brutally, as if tempted to lay her dead at his feet.

"You?" he hissed, venomously. "You?" The ghastly grin left her face. She drew back, her lip quivering, and a great tear splashing over her faded cheek.

"Yes, Edward," she answered, meekly. "Why are you here? Answer me that?"

"I came because you were here."

He ground his teeth, cursing fearfully. His long body curled itself up as a panther curls when ready to make some fearful leap.

"How dared you follow me?" he screamed. "How dared you?"

"Because—because—I love you."

The answer seemed to touch him. The white-heat of anger went out of his face. His hard mouth softened. He looked at the woman more kindly than he had done before.

"Poor Jane!"

The words were scarcely audible. But, low as was the tone in which they were uttered, the woman caught them. She sprang toward him with a hysterical cry.

"God bless you! Now you are kind and good again. Now you are my own Edward."

Her long arms wreathed themselves about his neck. He stood panting, gasping, shuddering in her embrace a moment, then released himself.

"Jane," he said, looking steadily in her face, "what do you intend to do, now that you are here?"

She hesitated, brushed her hand once or twice across her forehead, and then made answer, with a cunning smile:

"As if you did not know, Edward. Oh, for shame!"

He shrugged impatiently.

"Try to collect your senses, Jane. In the first place you may tell me if it was you who was asking for me, this morning?"

"Oh, yes, of course," smiling and bobbing.

"But you asked for Mr. Dent."

"I know," bobbing again, and leering at him cunningly. "But, what's in a name? Did you think a name could hide you from me, Edward?"

"No," he answered, biting his lip.
 "No," she echoed, triumphantly, it seemed.
 "You might be Brown or Smith or Jones to the rest of the world, but you would still be Edward, my Edward, to me."

"How did you find me here?"
 "How?" pressing her fingers upon her temples. "How? The birds must have told me where to look for you, or the night-winds whispered it. I don't know? I can only tell that I wanted you so very much."

He was silent. He cast uneasy glances up and down the path. What if some one were to come down from the house. How could he rid himself of her?

"The birds and the night-winds told me something else," she went on, after a pause. "They told me you were learning to love another. I believe that is why I came."

"To learn if the birds and the winds were telling you the truth?"

"Yes."

"And if they were?"

She writhed, started away from him a little, and said, sharply:

"I think I should kill you!"

Mr. Dent sprung forward and caught her arm in a vise-like grip.

"You fool! You accursed fool!" he shrieked.

"Come away with me! You shall come!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A WOMAN'S COQUETRY.

THAT same evening, just as the early dusk was beginning to shroud the landscape in its purplish glooms, Grace Atherton sat at her chamber window, leaning over the sill.

Her face looked flushed. She was eagerly watching and listening, with her brilliant eyes fixed upon a single spot in the shrubbery below.

The syringas parted presently, and a young man stepped out into the path. He was a very handsome fellow, blonde-bearded and yellow-haired. He had a tall, well-knit figure, and the muscular arms and limbs of a young athlete.

He gazed anxiously up the path for a moment, as if expecting somebody to come down from the house to meet him, and then, dropping his head dejectedly, sprung into the screen of bushes again.

Grace had drawn back from the window soon enough to avoid being seen by him; but not before she had sharply scrutinized both form and feature.

"I am not mistaken," she muttered. "It is the same mysterious stranger who met Rachel in the garden the night when she first came to Fairlawn. He has come back in the hope of seeing her again."

Grace knitted her brow thoughtfully. She had been waiting for the last fifteen minutes for a good view of the dark figure she had seen creeping in and out the shrubbery, in the bush-green garden, by the merest accident, a little while before.

When the opportunity came at last, she felt no surprise at the discovery she made. It never once occurred to her that she might be mistaken. She had seen that figure only once before, and then in the somber gloom of night; but she was sure she knew it again.

After a moment's deliberation, she rose, threw a light scarf over her head, and descended to the garden.

"I will keep tryst with your lover in your stead, for this time, my beautiful Rachel," she thought, a half-cynical smile curling her red lip. "It would be scandalous for a betrothed young lady like yourself to go about meeting strange men in all sorts of places."

She walked rapidly toward the spot where she had seen the handsome stranger. Her tread was light and noiseless as that of a spirit. As fate would have it, she met the man face to face, just as he had stepped into the path to take another observation.

He recoiled, growing very red in the face. He seemed surprised and confused at seeing a beautiful young lady standing there, looking at him with such a pretty air of assumed bewilderment.

"I beg your pardon, miss," he muttered, apologetically, raising his hat to her.

"He is superb—a perfect Apollo," thought Grace. "Rachel's infatuation no longer puzzles me."

Aloud she said, with a pretty air of blended dignity and courtesy:

"Were you going to Fairlawn?"

"No, miss," he answered, hesitatingly. "I am a trespasser on these grounds."

"Perhaps you were looking for some one?"

"No—no!"

He bowed, walked on a few steps, and then turned back again.

"I was looking for some one," he said. "Perhaps you can help me. At any rate, I wish to trust you. One so beautiful would not betray me."

She dropped her bright, dark eyes, and made answer:

"Whom do you wish to find?"

"Miss Clyde."

"Rachel?" she exclaimed, with a well-affecting start.

"Yes, Rachel Clyde," he returned, eagerly.

"You know her?—you are her friend?"

She nodded.

"I was sure of it. I am very anxious to see her, but for certain reasons, cannot ask for her at the house. Will you send her here to me?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

She smiled brightly, and turned as if to go away. Then a sudden thought seemed to strike her.

"Dear me! I had forgotten!" she exclaimed, in well-acted dismay. "Rachel is out driving with Mr. Dent."

She uttered the falsehood so glibly that the young man never thought of doubting her word.

"Driving with Mr. Dent?" he echoed. "That is strange—very strange indeed."

"I do not think so."

She was laughing softly. He looked at her steadfastly.

"Why not?" he queried.

"Of course you know they are betrothed lovers?"

He started a little, and then burst into a loud laugh.

"Rachel and Mr. Dent lovers? No, I did not know it. Perhaps you will tell me next that oil and water have assimilated."

Grace drew herself up haughtily.

"You doubt my word, sir, but I have told you the truth. If they are not lovers, they ought to be, for they are to be married in less than two weeks."

"Married?"

"You seem to delight in echoing my words, sir. I really wish you would not."

Glancing up at him swiftly, she saw that he had grown ghastly pale. One of his clenched hands was uplifted, shaking wildly in the air.

"Married?" he said again. "You are trifling with me. Rachel marry that man! Ah, just heaven!"

"Why shouldn't she marry him?" said Grace, tartly.

"Why? Good God!"

He stood writhing and quivering. Something in her face seemed to strike sudden conviction to his heart. He turned upon her almost fiercely.

"Is this thing true you are telling me?" he demanded.

"As true as the gospel," she made answer.

A groan broke from him. He covered both hands over his face, a moment, and then removed them.

"I beg your pardon," he said, in a hoarse voice. "I had no right to doubt your word."

"You had no occasion, at least."

"But this is such a terrible thing for me to believe—" He stopped suddenly. Overpowered by the emotion that wrung his soul, he caught her hand and pressed it to his lips.

"Dear lady," he cried, "tell me everything. I would know the worst. Do you know why Rachel consented to wed that man?"

"Because he is rich, and she is poor, I suppose."

"No, no! You are very wide of the truth. It was not that—it was not that. I think I see it all. She meant to sacrifice herself to others. She meant to sacrifice herself to me!"

He stopped to wipe away the clammy drops that had broken out on his forehead.

"She shall not do it," he went on, fiercely. "That villain, that thrice-accursed villain has driven me a step too far! He shall yet pay dearly for all this wrong and treachery."

Then he flung her hand rudely, violently from him, swung on his heel, and darted like a madman into the shrubbery.

Grace felt frightened and puzzled. She had seen something awful in the man's face before he left her so abruptly—a dark, vengeful hatred that made her shudder.

What had she done? Too late she regretted bitterly her careless words—her silly artifice to arouse the jealousy of this handsome stranger. Murder might come of it, and if so, could she ever hold herself guiltless?

Thoroughly alarmed, she turned and fled precipitately toward the house. Mrs. Heathcliff met her on the terrace steps.

"Oh, mother!" she moaned, throwing herself, panting and sobbing, into the perplexed woman's arms.

Mrs. Heathcliff gently sought to soothe her.

"My poor child, what has happened? Why are you so disturbed? Try to tell me, and to compose yourself."

Grace shivered from head to foot. She was really very much frightened. She feared some terrible calamity would follow her idle words.

"I have been so foolish, so culpable," she cried. "I can never forgive myself."

Then, in answer to her mother's questions, she related the scene that had transpired in the garden.

"That poor young fellow was nearly frantic," she said, in conclusion. "If he meets Mr. Dent, there will be blood spilled between them."

Mrs. Heathcliff had stood leaning against the iron railing that protected the steps. Her face was ashy white, and a wild look of terror showed itself in every feature.

"That man—the stranger," she muttered, giving no heed to Grace's last words. "What was he like?"

"Tall and handsome, with a blonde beard—"

"And wonderful yellow hair?"

"Yes, the most beautiful hair in the world—like spun gold."

Mrs. Heathcliff hid her face, and slowly faltered:

"It is he!"

Grace caught the words. "Who is it?" she demanded.

No answer. "Who is it?" she cried, again. "Mother, you know that man! Why will you not tell me who he is?"

Mrs. Heathcliff brought the color back to lip and cheek by a powerful effort.

"Hush, child," she said, harshly. "You are mistaken. I know no more of him than you have told me."

Grace shrugged, coughed, wiped her beautiful eyes, and said, after a pause:

"Mr. Dent was not in the house an hour ago. Has he returned?"

"No."

"You don't know where he is?"

"No."

"I was sure of it," clasping her hands, and looking scared. "He must be in the grounds, and might meet the stranger at any moment."

"True," returned Mrs. Heathcliff, knitting her brow thoughtfully.

"It must not be permitted. I tell you murder will be done!"

"Who is to prevent it?"

"You—and I—" answered Grace, hysterically. "Come down into the shrubbery with me. You must come. I cannot rest until I have found Mr. Dent or the stranger."

"Humph!" sneered Mrs. Heathcliff, but her lips were colorless, and she offered no opposition.

They slipped noiselessly into one of the nearest paths. Twilight had deepened rapidly. It was now quite dark in the shaded walks, but a gibbous moon hung in the western heaven.

They had not proceeded far when the report of a pistol, at no great distance, rung out sharp and shrill on the quiet air.

Grace heard it, and uttered a wild, wild shriek.

"Too late—too late!" she screamed. "Oh, my God, what have I done?"

Then she fled precipitately in the direction from whence the sound proceeded.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PISTOL-SHOT.

THAT same evening, and about the same hour, Rachel was wandering by herself in the more remote grounds.

She had stolen forth quietly. She did not wish anybody—even Colonel Heathcliff himself—to know she had left the house.

By perfect silence in regard to her own movements—and in that way alone—could she hope to escape Mr. Dent's unwelcome attentions.

She was to be his wife, her promise had been given already, but she meant to enjoy her freedom away from him as long as possible.

It was a beautiful night—calm, cool, odorous with the balmy breath of summer in its golden prime breathing softly upon her cheek.

Bordering on the remote grounds was a small lake, and having reached its shore she sat down on a fallen log that lay drifted across the yellow sands, to rest.

Somebody came up behind her, presently. She heard the step, but sat quite still, with a wildly-beating heart. She would have known it among a thousand.

Nearer and nearer it came—a slow, weary step that had no life or elasticity about it. It paused an instant, less than two yards away, there was a sudden exclamation of surprise, and then it bounded close to her side.

"Rachel—my Rachel!"

The cry came straight from a breaking heart. She felt herself clasped in the embrace of two warm, loving arms. Hot kisses were showered on lip and cheek.

She knew it was Dr. Tremaine who held her thus. But she had no strength to resist him. Heaving a long-drawn sigh of relief, she rested her head on his great, heaving chest, and for a moment was happy.

"Thank God for this!" he murmured, in low, rapt tones. "At first I meant to pass you without a word. I tried to do it; but I could not—I could not."

He kissed her over and over again, while she lay passive in his arms, like a weary child, passive, scarcely breathing, in fact.

"Oh, Rachel, you are such a puzzle to me," he went on. "Sometimes I am as sure of your love for me as of mine for you. I am at this moment. I know you love me. If you do not, you are either very coquettish or very cruel. Let me clasp you closer, darling. It is happiness to hold you thus. The memory of this blissful moment will help me to endure the coldness and indifference with which you may greet me the very next time we meet."

His eager, pardonable words called her to herself. She writhed out of his arms, and turned as if to fly.

"God help me!" she moaned. "You must let me go. I am the promised wife of another."

"I will not let you go until you tell me with your own lips if you love me."

He was close to her side again, with his arms held out, and his great, burning eyes—eyes so full of love and despair and mute appeal—fixed steadfastly on her face.

"This is madness," she murmured.

"It is destiny," he answered. "We were meant for each other. Dare you deny it?"

She could not. She stood palpitating and trembling; her strength, her power of resistance was nearly gone.

"Go away," she pleaded, piteously. "You see how weak I am. Mercy!"

"Have you been merciful to me?"

"Oh, Dr. Tremaine, you do not know—you do not even guess—what I have suffered of late. I have not been mistress of my own actions, even. You must not judge me."

"I will not. I will only love you. Come, Rachel."

His arms were stretched toward her again. Ah, what a sweet haven of rest they seemed to promise, clasped close to that beating heart.

A fierce temptation assailed her for the moment. She leaned nearer and nearer to the waiting arms, as if drawn thither by some magnetic force. Another instant, and her head would have been pillowed upon his breast.

A sound startled her—the report of a pistol near at hand. It echoed sharply on the still night air. She started up wildly. A single thought seemed to take possession of all her being.

"Oh, Dick, Dick!" she screamed, pressing her hands to her head.

She would have plunged into the gloom of the shrubbery that bordered the lake, but Dr. Tremaine held her back.

"What is it?" he asked. "What do you fear?"

"Dick, Dick!" she cried again. "They have murdered him!"

Dr. Tremaine's face shadowed. Who was "Dick?" The handsome young fellow he had seen with her in the garden, that night?

"It was some fowler," he said, soothingly. "You have no need to tremble so. It is not unusual to hear a pistol-shot in the vicinity."

But the report seemed to startle her in very nearly the same way it had startled Grace. She had an instantaneous conviction that some misfortune had happened.

"Let me go," she cried, eagerly. "I must know the worst. Let me go."

"I will go with you."

He clasped her hand tightly, and led her into the profound gloom of the shrubbery, where the pale moon helped to light their way, walking rapidly in the direction from whence the report had come.

Rapid as was his step, Rachel more than kept pace with him. She breathed heavily, and hurried onward over every obstruction, with a fierce eagerness that would brook no delay.

Finally they reached an open glade on the other side of the lake, at a little distance from the water's edge. The pale moonbeams, dropped into this secluded spot with a cold and silvery luster.

Dr. Tremaine paused an instant, and sought to hold back his companion, as they emerged from the shrubbery.

He saw Mrs. Heathcliff and Grace standing in the center of this glade, bending over some dark object lying at their feet.

Let me go forward first," he said, almost harshly.

But Rachel gave a wild stare all around, and pushed off his detaining hand.

"No, no, no!" she shrieked, and rushed toward the little group.

Dr. Tremaine had no resource but to follow. He saw Mrs. Heathcliff start, and frown darkly, as they came up; but she instantly made room for them.

"Murder has been done," she said, in cold, stern tones.

"Murder?" echoed Rachel.

She reeled giddily. She knew there was a dark, still object lying on the dewy grass before her. But she could not look down. She tried to do so, and reeled giddily.

"Who has been killed?" she shrieked, clasping her fingers over her temples. "Who is lying there? Oh, why will you not tell me?"

"It is Mr. Dent!"

"Mr. Dent?"

She stood as if paralyzed, a moment. Great, clammy drops broke out all over her forehead. She tottered, and clung quaking to the arm of Grace for support.

"Oh, merciful Heaven!"

Mrs. Heathcliff stared at her darkly, and

luridly, it seemed. The moonlight shining on her face, showed how white and stern it was.

"God forgive you, Rachel," she said, "if this is your work."

"Her work, mother?" cried Grace, starting and trembling. "Hush, oh, hush! You know it is not."

"Directly, it may not be. But there was a reason for the fearful deed that has been done. What was that reason?"

She glared around, from one to the other, but nobody made answer. Dr. Tremaine was stooping over the body, and carefully examining it.

"He is quite dead," he muttered, "The ball must have pierced some vital part, and death was instantaneous."

Mrs. Heathcliff heard without heeding him. A dark flush had crossed her face.

"I must speak out my mind here and now," she said. "Jealous hatred was the palpable cause of this murder. Mr. Dent was betrothed to Rachel. She had another lover, a mysterious stranger, who never dared show his face—a tall, yellow-haired young fellow who has been seen more than once hovering about these grounds. He—"

A bitter moan came from Rachel's white lips. It touched even the heart of Grace. In an agony of remorse and contrition she sprung to her mother's side.

"Don't go on," she pleaded. "For the love of heaven, say no more!"

Mrs. Heathcliff was silent a moment, standing with her mouth firmly shut and drawn down at the corners in a sort of angry perturbation. Then she cried out, fiercely:

"I will speak! This yellow-haired stranger is the murderer, and should be denounced as such. I here denounce him. He must be found and brought to punishment."

"Dick—poor Dick!" gasped Rachel, in faint, heart-sick tones.

The words were forced from her lips in spite of every effort to keep them back. Grace looked scared, perplexed.

"Hush!" she whispered. "Say nothing, do nothing to betray him."

Grace looked a ghost herself. She was shaking from head to foot. She felt guilty, miserable. Would this terrible calamity ever have happened if she had held her peace?

"Oh, my God! what have I done?" she thought.

Aloud she said, turning her white face upon her mother:

"This is no time for idle accusations. For my sake, if not for Rachel's, be silent."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE END OF THE RED TRAIL.

MRS. HEATHCLIFF replied with an angry snort. But she had done all the mischief she cared to do at that moment, and could afford to remain silent.

Grace's demeanor puzzled her, however. She could not understand that the iron of remorse had already pierced the proud girl to the heart.

Seeing the crime and misery she had perhaps, though unwittingly, caused, wrought a sudden and radical change in the haughty beauty.

Dr. Tremaine's brow was dark and lowering.

"Madam," he said, coldly, "our first duty is to the dead. Afterward we can give more thought to the living."

Mrs. Heathcliff caught the tone of reproach in which these words were uttered and bowed stiffly, though with curling lip.

"I accept the rebuke. Now what is to be done?"

He was about to answer, but stopped suddenly, with his eyes bent steadfastly upon the ground.

"Strange," he muttered. "Here is a trail of blood leading away from the spot."

Stooping nearly to the ground, he distinguished it plainly in the moonlight—clots and smears of blood on the grass and the shrubbery, looking like dark, unsightly blots in the

uncertain light, but clearly blood to his practised eye.

Grace knelt beside him. She groped along the grass. She, too, saw the blood, and one of her hands was stained by it.

She wiped it off, shuddering.

"The trail leads toward the shrubbery," she said.

"Yes," answered Dr. Tremaine, thoughtfully.

"Not from it?"

He did not answer, but silently pointed out the perceptible impress of a heavy foot in a bed of yielding moss at the distance of three or four yards. The foot was certainly pointed away from the spot where the corpse was lying.

The eyes of the two met for a moment. The same thought had entered the mind of each.

"For Rachel's sake," whispered Dr. Tremaine, rising, very white, but uttering no other word.

"For Rachel's sake," answered Grace, in the same low tone, following him back to her mother's side.

But Rachel had been watching them with great staring, wide-open eyes, full of unutterable dread and terror. Nothing that had been said or done had escaped her observation.

She crept up close to Dr. Tremaine, took his hand in her own that shook so he could scarcely hold it, and pressed it warmly.

"Thank you," was all that she said.

It was enough. He knew from that moment she had caught at his own suspicion, and shared it.

Now, turning sharply round, he said:

"Go to the house, all of you, for help. I will remain with the body. Send three or four men with a litter."

"Yes, it must be done," said Mrs. Heathcliff, drawing her scarf more closely, and shivering a little. "You will have a lonely watch while we are away. Come, Grace."

Rachel lingered behind the rest. Her eyes were burning like two stars in the fearful pallor of her face.

"Let me share your vigil," she pleaded.

Giving her a swift glance, he replied:

"No, I am not afraid to remain alone. Go, quickly."

His look said:

"You must go. It is the only way if you do not wish to call immediate attention to what you and I suspect."

She understood him.

"I will go," she whispered, heaving a long-drawn sigh. "Dr. Tremaine, I can trust you to do what is for the best."

This was all. Mrs. Heathcliff and Grace were already several yards away. She ran forward to join them, and the next instant the shrubbery hid the three figures from Dr. Tremaine's sight.

He sat down beside the corpse, pale and languid, all the weariness and misery he felt showing itself in his face now that the necessity for concealment no longer existed.

Oh, how dreary and cheerless the moonlight looked, sifting through the tangled greenness of the wood, lying on the wet and glistening grass, and creeping noiselessly over the pallid features of the dead man by his side.

What a vast grave of wrecked hopes the world seemed, with sorrow and heart-break perpetually striding up and down its length like twin-sisters, ever inseparable!

"What will the end be, oh, what will the end be?" he repeated to himself, more than once, while that lonely vigil lasted. "Poor Rachel! God pity her!"

Well might he say that!

It was, indeed, poor Rachel! His heart bled for her. Every doubt he had ever felt was increased ten-fold by what had happened. She loved this handsome stranger who had murdered Edward Dent! In vain he tried to think otherwise. The conviction would force itself home upon his mind.

How she must suffer, knowing all his guilt and wickedness!

"Ah, had she only loved me one-half so fondly, how happy I might have made her," he thought, once, and then grew ashamed of his own selfishness.

Presently voices sounded in the distance, and footsteps drew near. Four men emerged from the shrubbery, bearing some object between them.

They were the men Mrs. Heathcliff had sent with the litter.

It was a solemn procession that filed along the shadow-haunted path leading up to Fairlawn a little later. Dr. Tremaine walked first, with his head uncovered, and the cooling night-winds lifting the curls from his white forehead.

When they reached Fairlawn he had thrown off his heartsick mood, and was his placid, alert self once more.

He took care to send the men in different directions before Mrs. Heathcliff had an opportunity to see them—one for the village doctor, one for the undertaker, and the remaining two on other errands.

He walked about the house, silent and watchful. Presently he saw a demure little figure in sober drab glide out of a side door opening upon the terrace, and fit like a spirit across the lawn.

It was Rachel. Of course he guessed her errand.

"She is going to look for the murderer."

He hesitated a moment, uncertain what to do. Then he snatched up his hat and followed her.

It seemed mean and wrong to be dogging her footsteps like this. But he plunged recklessly into the shrubbery. His anxiety would not suffer him to remain inactive. Some harm might come to her.

She paused every now and then to listen, as she drew nearer the scene of the murder. Dr. Tremaine was compelled to moderate his speed, and move with extreme caution.

She did not linger in the glade, but ran on swiftly, as if frightened, plunging into the bushes toward which the bloody trail had pointed.

Finally she halted and called in a soft, suppressed voice: "Dick, Dick! Where are you, Dick?" and then ran on a little further, crying out again in the same manner.

The second time there came an answer. It was a low moan only, and sounded from a dense thicket at the left.

She seemed to know the voice. With a quick exclamation of relief and joy, she thrust the thick branches aside and ran onward.

Dr. Tremaine stood quite still, listening. He heard two or three low cries, an eager whisper, and then the sound of suppressed weeping.

Afterward there was a silence. It lasted so long he grew frightened, at last, and was preparing to move on when he heard a little rustling of the leaves, and Rachel stood before him.

She drew back, crying out sharply. He could see her whole figure quiver in the moonlight.

"You?" she said, shrilly.

"Forgive me," and he held out his hand with a pleading gesture. "I saw you steal away from the house, and followed you. I dared not trust you to come alone."

She seemed to catch her breath quickly once or twice. At last she looked up at him.

"You know all, Dr. Tremaine?"

"I know that the—that he is concealed in yonder thicket," he answered, pointing behind her.

"Oh, my God!" She sprung forward. She caught his hand, raised it to her lips. "You are good and kind and noble," she cried. "You will not betray him, Dr. Tremaine? You will not?"

The anguish of her appeal went straight to his heart.

"I may be doing wrong; I shall be severely censured. But, for your sake, Rachel, I will do nothing to bring the criminal to justice."

She covered his hand with her kisses and her tears. She seemed almost beside herself.

"That is not all," she faltered, after a pause.

"We need help—your help."

"You shall have it."

She met his gaze with an earnest, wistful look.

"Do you quite understand me?"

"I think I do," he answered.

"That we need your assistance as a physician?"

"Yes. This man—your friend—is wounded. I suspected as much when I discovered the bloody trail in the glade."

"We may trust you—we may depend upon you?"

"Yes."

She drew a long breath of relief and satisfaction.

"Come with me," she whispered, leading the way into the thicket.

Dr. Tremaine followed. On a mossy bank, where a chance strip of moonlight fell clear and bright, lay the wounded man. His face looked ghastly, and his beautiful yellow hair fell over his forehead in wild disorder.

He heard Dr. Tremaine's step, and started up, glaring at him savagely.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Hush, Dick," said Rachel, gliding to his side. "Dr. Tremaine is our friend."

"Our friend!" he repeated, gazing steadfastly and half-suspiciously at the new-comer.

"Yes, Dick. Do you think I would trust him if he were not?"

"No, no."

He put out his hand with a low, faint laugh.

"Excuse me, Dr. Tremaine, if I do not rise to greet you. But you are very welcome, and you are indeed Rachel's friend and mine."

CHAPTER XIX.

DR. TREMAINE'S GUEST.

"I AM Rachel's friend," said Dr. Tremaine, sharply.

"So, so."

"If I do anything to help you, it will be for her sake."

The young man's lip curled. "Very well," he answered, coolly. "I am not disappointed. I never expected my fellow-beings to do much for the sake of humanity."

The words made Dr. Tremaine wince. He studied that handsome, fearless countenance more closely than he had done before. The moonbeams shed a glory upon it, and upon the shining hair that crowned the superb head like an aureole.

He felt almost as if gazing upon some divine creation of the old masters—a pictured saint, rather than tangible flesh and blood.

Had that bright, handsome, fearless young fellow stained his hand with the blood of a fellow-being? It seemed monstrous, improbable—he could scarcely believe it.

"You are hurt," he said, in a gentler tone, bending over him.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Here, in my side. It's an ugly wound, but not dangerous, I hope."

"I will see."

Rachel left them for a few moments, while the examination took place. When Dr. Tremaine called her back, she found the wounded man lying very still, looking ghastlier than ever.

"Well?" she said, abruptly.

She could force no other question to her lips. But none other was needed.

"The hurt is a bad one, but not necessarily dangerous," said Dr. Tremaine, kindly. "He will need careful nursing, however."

She began to shake from head to foot. When she was able to command herself sufficiently, she said:

"Dick will not be able to leave the neighborhood?"

"For the present—no."

She clasped her fingers over her temples. For a moment she glared at him as if she were going mad.

"They will take him!" she muttered. "They will take him!"

"No, they shall not."

"Who will prevent it?"

"I will."

She threw out her hands with a hysterical cry. "Oh, if you would—if you only would!"

"I will. Have no fears."

"But here?"

"We must get him to my house—you and I."

It is just outside the village—half a mile distant across these fields. Nobody comes there, and I keep only two servants, a housekeeper and one other. They are faithful. I would trust my own life in their hands. They would keep our secret, and no one would dream of searching my house for a criminal."

"No one."

She stood quite silent a moment, as if dazed. But tears of gratitude overflowed her eyes, and rolled down her cheeks.

"You are so good, so kind to me," she murmured. "And I have brought only misery to you."

He made a quick gesture.

"Hush. We will not speak of that. Are you brave—are you strong?"

"Yes; quite strong."

"We must get away from this as soon as possible."

"Oh, yes, yes. Be quick. Let us not lose a moment."

The color came back to her ghastly face. Dick's peril made her forget her own suffering. She grew active, vigilant, alert, in a moment.

Dick was lifted up between them. The effort must have pained him fearfully, for his brow contracted, and he bit his lip. But he manfully kept back all other manifestation of the agony he endured.

"Lean upon me, Dick," whispered Rachel, eagerly. "Don't mind how heavily. I am very strong—indeed I am."

"You are my good angel, Rachel," said the young man, in the same suppressed tone.

But Dr. Tremaine's ears were quick enough to catch everything. He would rather not have heard, but how could he help it?

"They must love each other very dearly," he thought, unable to repress a bitter pang at the reflection.

That night-journey across the fields was a long and tedious one. Many times were they compelled to sit down and rest by the way, for Dick (as Rachel called him) was a helpless burden in their hands, and they could proceed but slowly.

The poor girl grew feverishly impatient. At the slightest sound she would start and clasp her hands, or look behind her with a frightened cry, as if she feared pursuit.

At last a long, low house, half buried in shrubbery, rose up before them like an enchanted dwelling dropped in their path on some propitious moonbeam.

"Courage, Rachel," breathed Dr. Tremaine, softly. "We are almost there."

"Thank God!"

Then she suddenly caught up Dick's hand, kissing the listless fingers over and over again in a sort of wild ardor.

"Oh, Dick, Dick," she cried, "I feel that you are saved!"

The house looked dark and silent, but Dr. Tremaine drew Rachel and her companion into the shadow of some vines, and rung the bell sharply.

There was a long delay, but at last the door was opened by an elderly servant-woman. She cried out at sight of Dr. Tremaine, standing there:

"Oh, master! I thought you were home and in bed long ago."

"Hush, Martha. I have brought some friends with me. This young man has been badly hurt. He must remain here several days, and you and I will nurse him."

He led Dick forward as he spoke.

"Yes, master."

"And," speaking a little sternly, this time, "nobody is to be told that he is in the house, let what will happen. You understand?"

She nodded. She did not even look much surprised. Perhaps she had grown used to strange freaks on her master's part.

"You are to tell Mary exactly what I have told you. I know you can both be trusted. Now help me to get the poor young fellow into the house."

There was no light save the one Martha carried. Once in the hall, Dr. Tremaine tarried a little, and threw open the nearest door.

"Come in here," he said to Rachel. "You are not to go away. I will return for you as quickly as possible."

He had lighted the lamps while speaking. Then he went away. Rachel heard him leading Dick into another room.

She sunk into the nearest seat with a gesture of utter weariness. She felt giddy and faint. She could scarcely tell whether she were awake or dreaming. Was all this horror real?

A half-hour went by. Then the door opened again, and Dr. Tremaine looked in.

"You can see your friend now if you wish," he said. "I have dressed his wounds."

She started up eagerly. When she reached the door she recoiled a little, growing very pale again.

"He will not die?" she faltered. "Dick will not die? You have discovered nothing new?"

"No. The wound is deep, as I said before, but not dangerous. With careful nursing he will recover."

She drew a long, sobbing breath.

"The ball!" she said. "Did you succeed in removing it?"

Dr. Tremaine bit his lip, and a puzzled expression showed itself in his face.

"It was not a pistol-shot that wounded him."

"Oh, no, no. Of course not. I heard but one report."

She pressed her hands quickly to her brow as if to still some awful pain that was there.

Dr. Tremaine was watching her.

"You are faint," he said, his tone a little sharp. "Rouse up. You have borne a good deal. You must not give way now."

She forced a wan smile to her lips.

"I'm better. I will not give way. Lead on."

Before they were half-way across the hall, however, she stopped him again.

"You say Dick's wound was not given him by a pistol-ball. What then?"

"He was stabbed!"

She echoed the word. Her look was ghastly.

"Yes. A long, thin knife must have been used."

"I don't understand it. My brain is not clear to-night. Oh, I don't understand it!"

"No wonder, poor child," said Dr. Tremaine, trying to soothe her. "I think there must have been a struggle. The poor fellow was wounded, perhaps, even before the shot was fired—that—that—killed Mr. Dent."

A quick shudder ran all over her. She signed for him to say no more.

He led her to the door of an apartment near the end of the hall.

"Go in," he whispered. "But you must not remain long, or talk too much. Your friend is very weak."

He opened the door, let her pass in, then closed it softly again, and went away.

CHAPTER XX.

FAITHFUL FOREVER.

RACHEL found herself in a luxuriously-furnished bedchamber. Pictures and statuettes adorned the walls, and the floor was covered with a soft velvet pile.

On a handsome bedstead of carved ebony, supported by pillows absolutely snowy in their whiteness, lay Dick, very pale, very languid-looking.

She crossed the floor and bent over him, her eyes filling.

"Oh, Dick, Dick!" she cried.

Holding out his hand to her, and smiling faintly, he said:

"Don't grieve for me, Rachel. I'm worth a dozen dead men yet."

It was a ghastly attempt at mirth. She shivered involuntarily.

"Would to God you had never come here! She was forgetting Dr. Tremaine's caution—forgetting everything save the one awful anguish that filled her soul. The words broke from her in spite of any effort to keep them back.

Dick understood her. A flush spread over his face and kindled in his eyes.

"Rachel," he cried out, "it isn't possible that you believe me guilty—that you think I killed that man?"

A burst of sobs was her only answer.

"I did not! I swear to you that I did not! These hands of mine are stainless of human blood, thank God."

She looked down at him eagerly. He flushed again, under her gaze, and turned away his face, as if not caring to meet her eyes.

"Dick, you would not deceive me?"

"Not to save my own wretched life."

"I believe you."

She flung her arms about his neck, kissing him in an agony of remorse and penitence. Oh, how helpless and exhausted he looked lying there!

"I am sorry I ever doubted you. But how could I help it? You will forgive me, Dick?"

"Yes," he answered, "I can forgive even that. I know you would not have deserted me, no matter how wicked and criminal I might have been."

"Never."

"I know more of your goodness to me than you think, Rachel. You knew I was in the power of that man who called himself Edward Dent. You would have sacrificed yourself to save me."

"Hush, hush."

"You would. You had promised to marry the villain. I know it."

To her wild stare he answered with a low, faint laugh.

"You wonder who told me—you meant to hide the truth from me, yourself. You knew I would suffer everything, rather than give you into that villain's hands."

"Yes, yes."

"And so I would. The cursed reprobate! Oh, Rachel, you do not know what I have suffered through that man!"

He ground his teeth fiercely together. An expression of such concentrated bitterness as made her shudder flitted across his face.

"Hush, Dick. Remember that he is dead."

"Ay, dead. I'm glad of that. He deserved to die, and just such a dog's death! Oh, there is no pity for him, no forgiveness, in my heart."

She put up her hand to stop him, but he did not mind her.

"He has tormented me for years, Rachel. He has hung on my path like a devilish bloodhound. I have never known peace or rest. Whichever way I fled to avoid him he was sure to turn up first or last, and I had to do it all over again—fly to some new spot and try to begin a new life there. Oh, God, I wonder how I endured it so long! I wonder this right hand of mine had not crushed him—struck him out of my path long since!"

Rachel wondered, too, realizing as she did how great must have been the temptation, and she felt that God had been very good to keep him from the crime.

She saw great clammy drops come out on his forehead and stand there like beads.

"He is dead, at last," he went on, as if talking to himself. "He can never again confront me with his knowledge of the past. No more threats and jibes to bear—no more cringing for me! Oh, this freedom is glorious!"

He laughed aloud. Rachel clasped her hand over his mouth, shocked, horrified.

"Don't, Dick," she pleaded. "It hurts me to see you like that."

"Does it, darling? Then I will restrain myself. I wouldn't pain you for the world. You know I would not."

"Yes."

He drew her toward him, kissing her lips half a dozen times in quick succession.

"Sweet Rachel, my blessed comforter," he

whispered. "We will be happy, so very happy! Nobody can molest us now. That is all over."

He grew so bright, so handsome and winning at the happy thought that she had scarcely the courage to rouse him from it.

"You forget," she whispered. "The dead man—the suspicious circumstances—"

She could say no more. He started up, shaking his fist wildly in the air.

"Will they dare suspect me of that villain's murder?" he screamed. "After all I have suffered through him, must he be my evil genius, even in death?"

"Oh, Dick, be calm!"

"How can I? Good God, this is more than I can bear!"

His head had fallen on the pillow so that his face was hidden. Rachel raised him gently, her tears dropping upon his face.

"It is hard," she said. "But I thought you had grown used to the thought that suspicion would be directed against you. I did not mean to excite you so."

"It was not you, Rachel. It was the memory of what that man has done to hurt me."

"Fear nothing," she went on, in the same soft, soothing strain. "Dr. Tremaine will hide you here until you are better. Then you and I will go away—very far away—and be happy together."

"You would go with me?"

"Oh, yes, yes."

"How good you are!"

Somebody tapped at the door just then. Rachel knew it was Dr. Tremaine, and she must go. It seemed very hard, but there was no help for it. She had meant to ask him just how he had received that wound and what he knew of Mr. Dent's murder, but, somehow, could not bring herself to do it.

Rising, she kissed his brow, and said, softly:

"Good-night. I will see you again soon."

"When, Rachel?" he asked, eagerly. "I shall count the moments. You will not leave me to suffer alone?"

"Never, when I can help it. But I must not come too often. I might be seen, you know."

She went slowly out. Dr. Tremaine stood in the hall, with his hat and gloves on, waiting for her.

"I could not let you remain any longer," he said. "It would not have been well for you or him."

He looked so pale, stern and haggard that Rachel felt almost afraid of him. She suffered him to slip her hand over his arm without one word of remonstrance.

"I shall take you back to Fairlawn," he said. "It would not be well for you to go alone."

Then they stepped out into the summer night again, and threaded their way along the nearest path to Fairlawn.

Scarcely a word was uttered. Dr. Tremaine walked on grave and silent. Rachel glanced eagerly up at him, once or twice. She wished he would speak to her, that he would not look so stern and cold.

The white moon was shining on his face. It wore an expression she could not analyze, and so she sighed softly to herself, and would not break the silence.

At last the little wicket in the hedge-row was reached. Dr. Tremaine opened it, pausing himself without.

"Good-night," he murmured. "Keep up your courage, Rachel. I will do all that can be done for you and him. Now go in; and take care that no one sees you or suspects where you have been."

He turned away, after having spoken thus, and walked rapidly back along the path by which he had come.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FACE AT THE WINDOW.

THE news of the murder spread like wild-fire through all that country.

Various were the surmises, the conjectures to which it gave rise. But, to the majority, the whole affair seemed wrapped in impenetrable mystery.

The few who knew something of the facts kept them carefully concealed. They wished to do so—all save one, and she was biding her time.

The exception was Mrs. Heathcliff.

To Colonel Heathcliff himself, Dent's sudden death was something of a relief. But for the terrible manner in which it had occurred, there would have been no question in his mind.

"After all, I believe it's better as it is," he thought. "Dent was a bad man. He was doing no sort of good in the world. I thoroughly distrusted him. Now, Rachel is saved from his clutches. The girl would have married him, in spite of us all, if this dreadful event had not occurred."

He knew very well that such a union would only conduce to make Rachel's whole life wretched beyond comparison.

For his own part, he was growing to love the girl more and more. A thousand times had he wished she was his own daughter, that he might guard and watch over her with a parent's affection. No father could have been fonder of her.

"Oh," he would sigh, "if my own darlings had been spared to me, my little Eloise would have developed into just such another treasure!"

He referred to twin children by a former marriage, who had met with the terrible fate of being burned to death in a sudden conflagration.

He was nearly as well as ever, now, but he would not, for one moment, think of giving up Rachel. She became more necessary to his happiness every day they were together.

Mrs. Heathcliff realized something of all this. Of course she hated the girl all the more bitterly because her husband had grown so fond of her.

"A stop must be put to all this," she would often say to herself, with an angry snort. "It is madness, ruin, to have matters go on in this way. I've sat passive long enough. The time has come for me to act, and I will do it, too! Oh, that I might crush them both—him and her—with the same blow! Oh, that I might!"

Then she would clench her hands, and her face would grow purple with passion, like the face of some Messalina.

The inquest sat; Dent's body was buried, and the day afterward Mrs. Heathcliff stalked stiffly into the apartment where her daughter was sitting.

"Grace," she said, sharply, "what are we going to do?"

"Do, mamma?"

"Yes. Don't echo my words, child; you know very well what I mean."

"But I don't, though," persisted Grace, changing color.

"You're not blind. I'm speaking of Rachel and—and—that lover of hers. You can see the sort of footing that girl is gaining in this house."

"Yes."

"Colonel Heathcliff will adopt her, yet, and leave her all his money."

Grace started up. Her face was ghastly.

"Mother," she said, in a very low voice, "would it be any more than justice if he were to do so?"

The eyes of the mother and daughter met. Mrs. Heathcliff dropped hers almost instantly.

"Fool!" she snarled, shaking her hand wildly in the air; "are you going to show the white feather?"

"At least I will never lend myself to anything mean or dishonest."

The firm, low tone was very impressive. Mrs. Heathcliff glared at the speaker, quite savagely.

"How long since you became so scrupulous?" she sneered.

"Since that night—that awful night," shuddered Grace. "I learned a lesson then I shall

never forget. Oh, you do not know what agonies of remorse I have suffered, or you would be kinder to me."

"Remorse?"

"Yes. I cannot forget it was I who goaded on that impulsive fellow until his fury culminated in a deed of horror."

Mrs. Heathcliff laughed somewhat shrilly. She was looking down at Grace steadfastly and luridly.

"I'm going to set the officers of the law on the track of that wretch of whom you speak!" she whispered.

"Oh, mother!" cried Grace, clasping her hands wildly. "You cannot! You will not!"

"You will see."

"For my sake, mother, don't do it."

"Bah!" sneered the angry woman. "Do you think I'm going to lose all the tricks in this desperate game, just because you have grown squeamish? No! I must work all the harder. I must fight for your interests, as well as mine."

Grace pressed her hands wildly over her heart.

"Mother," she cried, "hear me! I swear that I will never accept any good that comes to me in that way!"

"You fool, you little fool!"

I think Mrs. Heathcliff would have sworn, had she been a man. As it was, she shook her jeweled hand more fiercely than ever, and scowled darkly upon her daughter.

"You will not betray me?" she gasped.

"You would not dare do that?"

Poor Grace shook her head and burst into tears.

"I cannot forget you are my mother."

"Humph! What an affectionate child you are," bowing and grinning. "Such filial devotion is without a parallel."

Grace made no answer.

"Let me call to your mind one fact which you may have overlooked. You know as well as I do that Dr. Tremaine is madly in love with Rachel, and that Dent's death leaves her free to marry him."

Catching her breath sharply, Grace said in a muffled voice:

"It does."

"She will marry him unless you and I do something to prevent it."

"Yes. They love each other. They ought to be happy. God grant they will be."

She could bear no more. She fled away, choking with sobs, quite overcome.

Mrs. Heathcliff's hard face did not soften as she looked after her retreating figure.

"Poor fool!" she muttered. "I must get her over this stupid way of thinking. She'll come out all right in a few days. Now, she is nervous and excited. It would be useless to argue with her. I must act for us both, and without any assistance from her."

She did act, and to some purpose, for that very day she was closeted with one of the police force, to whom she revealed much of what has been transcribed in these pages.

Rachel, meanwhile, all unsuspecting what a persevering enemy she had in Mrs. Heathcliff, paid daily, or rather nightly visits to Dick—for she never went until near midnight, when everybody at Fairlawn was supposed to have retired.

This night she went as usual. Dr. Tremaine let her in, pale, grim, taciturn. It was always he who met her at the door.

He would conduct her to the chamber where the wounded man lay, and then would pace the hall until she came out again, when he would fetch his hat and see her safely home again.

This night Rachel looked into his face longer and more curiously than usual, when he met her at the door. Oh, how pale he was—how worn and thin!

"He is bearing my burdens for me," she thought, with a strange thrill and a keen pain. "I have made him very unhappy. Oh, if I could only tell him all—if he would only give me the opportunity to tell him!"

She raised her eyes to his with a wistful ex-

pression in their pure, clear depths. He saw it, changed color, and quickly averted his own gaze.

"Your friend is very restless to-night," he said, in his grave, quiet way. "You must try to pacify him."

Rachel nodded.

"Yes," she thought, "I will do that. But who is to comfort you?"

She turned away, feeling a vague sense of pain and misery. Where was the old freedom, the old friendly warmth that had been a part of their intercourse? Had this cold politeness usurped its place again?

She passed in to Dick's bedside, feeling tired and out of sorts. For the first time, she was cool and rather cross with him.

"You are late," he said, in a reproachful tone, as she bent over him.

"I could not come earlier. You know, as well as I do, it is scarcely safe for me to come at all."

"You don't love me," he cried, looking at her fixedly. "You begin to feel what a burden I am! I knew it would be so."

The glance and the words together melted her at once.

"Oh, Dick, Dick," she exclaimed, "you know I love you! Who else in all the wide world, could I love as I love you?"

They kissed each other fondly. After a little pause Rachel said:

"What have you told Dr. Tremaine?"

"Nothing."

She grew very grave, almost stern.

"Is it quite fair, Dick? He has been so kind, so good to us both."

"Very kind."

"He ought to be told everything. It is his right."

She was leaning over him, smoothing down his beautiful hair, so like bright, spun gold.

"I hoped you would tell him, Rachel," he whispered.

She caught her breath quickly. A vivid scarlet flamed over cheek and brow.

"I cannot! You know not what you ask."

Then, catching his wondering gaze, she said in a calm voice, that was still very firm:

"It is your duty, Dick. I hope you will not shirk it!"

"No," reluctantly.

"And you will tell him very soon—the whole story?"

"Yes."

"You may do so safely."

Another silence fell. The window, near the head of the bed, stood open, to admit the cool night-air. Glancing up quickly, Rachel saw a face—a woman's face, framed in by the thick vines that clustered about it!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BLOW FALLS.

It was a white, cold, stern face that Rachel saw at the window, and a pair of pitiless eyes seemed to be glaring in at her and Dick with all the ferocity of a wild beast.

A shrill scream of terror broke from Rachel's lips. She turned wildly toward the window. The face vanished.

"Oh, Dick!" she cried, and stood fixed where she was, like an image of death.

He had seen nothing.

"Why, Rachel—" he began. He got no further. The door was flung open suddenly, and Dr. Tremaine strode into the apartment.

He had been pacing up and down the hall outside, where Rachel's shrill cry had reached his ears.

"What has happened?" he demanded, looking eagerly from one to the other.

Rachel pointed to the open window. For a moment she could not speak, but stood panting and trembling.

"We have been watched," she gasped out, at last.

Dr. Tremaine seemed to understand, almost intuitively, what she had seen. He dashed to the window, swung himself lightly over the sill, and disappeared.

An interval of some minutes elapsed. Rachel

sat with both hands clasped over her beating heart. All her thoughts were of Dick and Dick's peril.

Had he been tracked to Dr. Tremaine's house? And was he suspected of having borne a part in that fearful night's work when Mr. Dent had been murdered?

It was distraction to think of this possibility at all. Her head grew hot and heavy as if she were going mad. She could not answer Dick's eager questions at all—she scarcely heard them.

At last Dr. Tremaine came back.

"I have searched the grounds thoroughly," he said, "but have found no one."

Then, after a minute's silence, he went on, with his eyes bent fixedly upon her.

"What did you see? You have not told me."

"A woman!"

He started, stared a little, and repeated, under his breath:

"A woman!" The answer seemed to surprise him. What should a woman be doing there at that hour of the night?

Rachel drew nearer to him, still quivering all over, and whispered:

"It was Mrs. Heathcliff! I'm sure it was Mrs. Heathcliff!"

"Impossible!"

"Oh, I hope it was all a mistake. But something tells me that woman is not my friend or Dick's."

Dr. Tremaine could not account for it, but he felt a suspicion of the same sort.

"She is not our friend," Rachel continued. "She must have followed me when I came here to-night; and if she did, she means harm to one or both of us."

She spoke wildly, incoherently. She scarcely knew what she was saying in the extremity of her terror and distress.

Dr. Tremaine seemed perplexed, but he said, with quite a stern look:

"Hush. You must not speak of Mrs. Heathcliff in that manner. She is a lady. She would never dream of making trouble for you or him."

Nodding slightly toward the bed where Dick was lying, he went out.

Rachel did not remain very late that night. She felt sick, frightened, tired. Dick's conversation wearied her. She could scarcely listen to him. For the first time she felt almost sorry he had ever come nigh her.

How much misery and heartache she might have been spared had he remained away from Fairlawn!

She bade him a cold good-night, and so left him. Dr. Tremaine walked back with her as usual. But he seemed colder and sterner than ever. Even while he was walking at her side it seemed as if seas of ice divided them.

She slept little that night. The momentary glimpse she had had of the face at the window haunted her. In vain she sought to banish it. It was constantly recurring to her thoughts.

Was it Mrs. Heathcliff she had seen? If so, what would be the result of this espionage?

When morning dawned her perplexity had only deepened. Mrs. Heathcliff met her with one of her blindest smiles, when she went down-stairs at a late hour, and kissing her on the cheek, said softly:

"How pale you are, my dear. I'm so sorry. I've ordered the carriage. You shall go out with me for a drive when you have eaten some breakfast."

Grace was standing near, at the time. She caught her mother's words. When Mrs. Heathcliff had left the room, she leaned quickly toward Rachel, and whispered:

"Don't go with her!"

"Why?" said Rachel, opening wide her eyes.

"I don't know," coloring and hesitating. "Perhaps I am very foolish, but it *does* seem to me that she wants your company for no good purpose."

Rachel stared. These were very singular words to come from the haughty beauty.

"You are surprised to hear me speak in this manner," Grace went on. "I can see it in your face. You have not fully trusted me in

the past. But I do answer you that I am now your friend."

Her lip quivered. She turned away, but paused at the door to add:

"I cannot tell you why I distrust my mother's motive in asking you to drive out with her. It is an intuitive feeling, though she has appeared strangely all the morning. I hope you will ponder what I have said to you."

Rachel did ponder it well; but she drew a deduction that was false.

"Mrs. Heathcliff has something to say to me, I'm sure," she thought. "Perhaps something about Dick. I had better go with her."

It was nearly noon when they set out. Mrs. Heathcliff drove directly toward the village. She seemed to have a wonderful flow of spirits. There was something strained in her unnatural gayety.

With Rachel it was very different. She grew nervous, excited. Her heart almost ceased to beat when they approached Dr. Tremaine's cottage, and the horses' heads were turned into the beech-lined avenue that led up to it.

"Where are we going?" she demanded, wildly.

"Don't be frightened, my dear," Mrs. Heathcliff made answer, with a smirk. "I've taken a fancy to pay Dr. Tremaine a morning visit—that's all. Of course you don't care? It's all very proper, under the circumstances."

She shot Rachel a swift glance from under her half-closed lids, and the poor girl was compelled to reply:

"You know best."

"Yes, my dear, I know best."

Nevertheless, Rachel trembled with apprehension. The warning words Grace had uttered came back to her. She wondered why Mrs. Heathcliff had taken this sudden fancy. It looked as if some danger threatened Dick.

But she dared not remonstrate. White as a lily, she followed Mrs. Heathcliff from the carriage, when it presently drew up before the door.

Dr. Tremaine came out to welcome them. He gave Rachel a quick glance of inquiry, and then said, pleasantly:

"This is a surprise, Mrs. Heathcliff. I had not thought my poor little dwelling would be so graced."

She smiled, flitted her point-lace handkerchief, and returned:

"I was always curious to take a peep at your bachelor establishment. Ladies are permitted to cross its portals, I suppose?"

"Oh, to be sure. They come like angels' visits, however. Enter, and let me make you welcome."

He flung wide the doors. Mrs. Heathcliff tripped lightly into the parlor, nodding for Rachel to follow. Her cheeks were all aflame and there was a peculiar sparkle in her bright, dark eyes.

She walked about the room, wondering and admiring. She did not notice, or else did not care, that no one else said any thing.

Rachel sat pale and silent. She could scarcely control herself. Mrs. Heathcliff often glanced in her direction, and each time, it seemed, more malignantly than before.

At last there came a sudden roll of wheels up the drive, and heavy steps crashing on the gravel. Dr. Tremaine walked to the window and looked out. While he stood there the steps came tramping through the hall.

The door was flung open. Several men entered.

Dr. Tremaine confronted them. He was pale but dignified.

"What means this intrusion?" he demanded.

"We have a warrant to search your house," answered the foremost man, respectfully.

"For what purpose?"

"You must already be aware."

"I am not," was the low, firm answer.

"Then I will tell you," said the man, glancing quickly around the apartment, his eyes meeting Mrs. Heathcliff's for a moment, as if

seeking encouragement. "We want to search your house because we have been told that the murderer of Edward Dent is hidden here!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DARK HOUR.

At those horrible words, which the man uttered in a cool, even voice, Rachel hid her face, and gave a long, gasping sigh.

She would have shrieked outright had not the necessity for self-control been forced so plainly upon her mind.

Dr. Tremaine drew nearer to her, with a slow gliding movement. Presently he took one of her hands in his, and slightly pressed it.

"Courage!" he whispered.

Then, sternly confronting the men, who stood grouped about the door, he said:

"You wish to search the house for the murderer of Edward Dent. Friends, neighbors, is this kind? Is it right? Have I ever given you reasons to suspect me of doing anything unlawful?"

"No, no," cried two or three voices.

"Think you I would harbor a criminal?"

"No, no," the same persons cried again.

"Then I hope you will go away quietly, and not put this indignity upon me."

The first speaker glanced furtively at Mrs. Heathcliff again, and then said, a little grimly:

"It is of no use, Dr. Tremaine. We must search the house. Those are our orders, which we are compelled to obey."

"Even though I give you my word of honor that you will find no criminal here?"

"Even then," was the grim answer.

The man hesitated a little, adding, in a lower tone:

"I trust you will not hinder us in the discharge of our duty. We have received positive information that the person we seek is in this house."

Dr. Tremaine started slightly. After a moment's thought he bent over Rachel's trembling figure, and said, softly:

"We will save him yet, if possible. Calm yourself. I will take the men up-stairs, first of all. While we are there, you must slip into Dick's room and get him out of the house. He can walk a little way, I am sure. Hide him in the shrubbery until these wretches are gone; then I will come to you. Do you understand?"

Lifting her ghastly face, she nodded, but did not speak.

"Are you strong enough to do it?"

"Yes, I am strong. Go trust me. I could endure anything for Dick."

"You are his good angel. Ah, would that I had the power to inspire such love!"

Turning, as he spoke, he found Mrs. Heathcliff's dark eyes fixed steadfastly upon his face. Something in their expression—a furtive, treacherous glance—made him shudder involuntarily.

"Come with me," he said, addressing the men. "If my humble home is to be profaned in this way, the sooner it is over the better."

Passing out at the door, he crossed the hall, and began to ascend the stairs, beckoning the men to follow.

"Your search shall be thorough enough," he muttered, sarcastically. "I'm going to take you from attic to cellar."

The men were preparing to follow him when Mrs. Heathcliff stopped them.

"My dear Dr. Tremaine," she said, sweetly, "why put yourself to so much trouble? I am sure if these persons are permitted to search the lower rooms they will go away satisfied."

"The lady is right," said the leader, in a firm voice. "We will confine our search to the lower floor."

He stepped toward the door of the apartment where Dick was lying, and laid his hand on the knob.

Dr. Tremaine sprang forward. "I beg you will not go in there," he said, earnestly.

"Why not, pray?"

"A very dear friend is lying ill in that room. Any excitement of this sort might prove fatal."

"Can't help it," returned the man, coolly.

"Duty is duty. Come on, boys."

The door creaked, swung on its hinges. Another moment and the men had filed into the apartment.

Rachel rushed past them all. She flung herself down by Dick's bedside, wringing her hands and crying out sharply:

"Oh, Dick, Dick!"

The man in command leaned quickly over her, stared an instant at the invalid, and then said, with a grim smile:

"Boys, this is the fellow we are after. He fully answers the description that was given me."

Dick was now sitting bolt upright among the pillows. He flung back his yellow hair, heavy and glistening like a lion's mane, and demanded angrily:

"What means this intrusion?"

"It means," answered the officer, with a sneering laugh, "that you are to be taken away from your comfortable quarters and provided with others not quite so desirable."

He seemed to require no other explanation. The flush faded slowly from his face. He drew a long, sighing breath.

"What have I done? Why have you come here to arrest me?"

"We arrest you for the murder of Edward Dent."

Dick's handsome lip curled. He stared at the man a moment, and then broke into a low, faint laugh.

"Odd," he muttered, nonchalantly. "Things come out very differently from what we anticipate, sometimes. But I do assure you" (speaking now to the officer) "that you have made a mistake. I had nothing whatever to do with the death of the man in question."

"Of course you would say that," was the sneering reply.

"And I speak the truth in saying it."

"Humph! I hope you will be able to prove it."

Dick scorned to reply. He laid his hand softly on Rachel's bowed head, and drew her closely to him.

"Courage," he whispered. "All will yet be well. They cannot condemn an innocent man."

She kissed him, and clung to him, sobbing and moaning as if her heart would break.

"Oh, Dick, they can't take you away! They must not take you away!"

"Hush! What matters it, after all? You can come to me in prison, just as you come to me now. And maybe you can help to prove my innocence."

Then, gently pushing her from him, he added:

"Now go away for a few moments. Of course these ruffians will let me dress before dragging me away."

Rachel turned slowly from the bed. As she did so, her eyes fell upon Mrs. Heathcliff's sneering, triumphant face.

At the sight, all her courage, her self-control, gave way. She suddenly remembered all that this woman had done to injure her. With one long, shrill scream, she ran forward and confronted her.

"This is *your* work!" she cried. "I see it all now. The face at the window—you have always hated me—you meant to harm me in some way! It was you who betrayed Dick!"

Mrs. Heathcliff started, paled perceptibly, looked as if she were tempted to strike the girl, and then screamed suddenly:

"She's mad! Catch her, somebody! She's fainted."

It was true. Dr. Tremaine took her in his arms, held her there white and still, close, close to his beating heart, and as he turned to bear her from the room, he said:

"Poor girl! She had a right to accuse you, Mrs. Heathcliff. You have been all—done all—that she said."

The woman did not answer. She flushed purple, drew herself up haughtily, but finally followed Dr. Tremaine from the room, and aided in restoring Rachel.

"You have no right to judge me," she said to Dr. Tremaine, when the girl's senses were coming back to her. "What possible object could I have in persecuting that poor wretch in yonder?"

Dr. Tremaine shook his head.

"I do not know."

"I should say not. Why, he's an utter stranger to me. I never saw him until to-day."

She met Dr. Tremaine's searching gaze unshrinkingly. Had she spoken the truth, or was she the most artful creature in existence?

He had no time to argue the question. Rachel was just then claiming all his attention. She had opened her eyes, and was glaring wildly all round.

"Where am I?" she asked. Then a low, sudden cry broke from her.

"Dick, Dick! I remember it all now. Oh, my God! Where is he, Dr. Tremaine? What have they done with him?"

"He is still in the house," was his reply.

"But they are going to take him away!"

He nodded.

She rose up slowly. A scarlet spot burned in either cheek.

"I shall go with him," she said, in a low, determined tone.

He attempted to dissuade her, but it was of no use. She was firm as a rock in the decision she had taken.

"Dick needs me," was her plea. "He is sick and in trouble. Do you think I could desert him at such a time? My God! Who else, in all the wide world, could make my place good to him?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

FAITHFUL LOVE'S REWARD.

DICK was taken to the county jail in the carriage that had been brought for that purpose. Dr. Tremaine himself brought pillows and blankets, and saw that everything was arranged as comfortably as possible for the wounded man.

Rachel rode in the same conveyance, supporting Dick's head in her lap, and with her dear hand clasped tightly in her own. What cared she for the curious eyes bent upon her as the carriage moved slowly through the streets?

Dr. Tremaine followed on horseback. He reached the jail at the same moment with the others, and was ready to assist in removing Dick to a cell.

Mrs. Heathcliff had returned to Fairlawn. She did not choose to be mixed up in the affair any more than was necessary.

Dick's wound had been healing rapidly during the few days he had remained under Dr. Tremaine's roof. But he was still very weak, and at his earnest request the preliminary examination was to be postponed until the following day.

Rachel and Dr. Tremaine went with him to his gloomy cell, and there the three were left alone together.

"I wish I could remain with you, Dick," sobbed Rachel, very white now, and trembling violently. "I wish I need not leave you alone in this dreadful place!"

"Poor Rachel!" said Dick.

She flung her arms about his neck.

"I won't leave you!" she cried. "They will not be so cruel as to tear me away! I will not leave you!"

Dr. Tremaine had been standing slightly apart from them. But he now came forward with a strange expression upon his pallid face.

"Do you wish to remain so very much?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, yes."

He hesitated, gasped once or twice, and then said:

"There is one way in which your wish can be gratified."

"One way?"

"Yes. You know it would not be right or proper for you to remain as you are."

"And the way of which you spoke?"

Forcing the words from his white, quivering lips, he made answer:

"You must marry him!"

Rachel stared wildly at these words, and from Dick's lips fell a low, faint laugh.

"I see I have startled you both," Dr. Tremaine went on. "Remember, I do not advise any such step. Indeed I should greatly regret it. But it is the only way in which you two can be together."

Dick held out his hand, now choking back something that sounded like a sob.

"You're a noble fellow, Dr. Tremaine," he said. "I can guess what such words must have cost you. But you can spare yourself further pain. I have no wish to marry Rachel, and could not, if I would, for the simple reason that *she is my own sister!*"

Dr. Tremaine started as if he had been struck. He could only stare wonderingly at the speaker.

"Your sister?" he gasped.

"Yes, my twin sister."

He staggered, and sat down on one of the rude stools with which the place was provided. Great drops came out upon his forehead. He was shaking all over. He could scarcely believe the strange news he had heard.

But gradually his face changed. An expression of wild joy broke all over it. A dozen little circumstances seemed to convince him, all at once, that Dick had spoken the truth.

"Oh, I am glad, so glad!" he cried.

He looked up. His eye caught Rachel's for a moment. He saw her start, and a sudden flood of crimson rush over her face.

"My darling!" he whispered, holding out his arms, all unmindful of Dick's presence. "My precious one! I believe you *do* love me, after all."

Rachel tottered forward, and fell upon his breast, sobbing wildly. And yet a strange peace and happiness had dawned suddenly upon her heart.

For a little while not another word was spoken. The lovers seemed to understand so well all that the other would have said, there was little need of speech.

The veil had been rent away from their lives, as if by a miracle, and at last they stood face to face and soul to soul, all things open as the day.

Dick drew apart into one of the remote corners, and sat down with his face covered. He understood perfectly what transports were in those long-sundered hearts. He had guessed Rachel's secret long before.

"They will be happy," he thought, with a weary sigh. "Thank God for that! No matter what new bitterness life may have in store for me, *they* will be happy."

He tried to rejoice, but I fear some dreary pictures of his own desolate, loveless future *did* flit across his mental vision.

At last he heard Dr. Tremaine say softly:

"Rachel, all things are growing so plain to me! And yet you have not uttered a word of explanation. I believe you have loved me all the while."

"All the while," she answered, in a low, cooing voice.

"And you have worn this mask to hide from me the sacrifice you were making?"

She did not answer, but looked into his face with such an earnest, pleading expression that he covered her lips with remorseful kisses.

"Why did you not trust me, Rachel? You might have done that. You must have known I would not see you suffer."

"How could I?" she faltered.

"For the very reason that you loved me so! Ah, foolish child! No one could have misjudged your innocent heart."

Rachel smiled through her tears, but made answer:

"The secret was Dick's more than mine. I had no right to betray it."

Dr. Tremaine gave a slight start.

"Secret?" he echoed.

"Yes," said Dick, now rising and coming forward. "This dear girl deserves to wear the crown of a martyr. No canonized saint ever was more faithful or self-sacrificing."

He took Rachel's hand, kissing it fondly.

"The secret concerns only myself," he went on. "But Rachel would have given up her own life to keep it. Can you not guess now *why* she consented to marry a man she both hated and despised? Can you not guess why she consented to marry him you have known as Edward Dent?"

"Yes, yes," said Dr. Tremaine, eagerly.

"That wretch knew everything. I was in his power. He could have given me into the clutches of the law at any moment. He would have done so but for Rachel. She stepped between us, and gave herself up in my stead."

CHAPTER XXV.

DICK'S STORY.

THERE was a brief silence in the room. Instinctively, Dr. Tremaine drew Rachel's quivering figure still more closely to him, as if he would fain shield her from all further sorrow.

And so he would have shielded her, with his own heart's blood, if necessary.

"Tell me your story, Dick," he said. "I only regret you did not tell it sooner."

"So do I," answered the young man. "But how could I be sure it was best? I have known you such a little while! To be sure you have been very kind. You have kept me hidden away from my enemies, dressed my wounds, and watched over me as carefully as a brother would have done. But, when a man carries with him such a secret as mine, he is very loth to part with it."

He laughed as he spoke, a low, bitter laugh, scarcely pleasant to hear.

"I would have been faithful to the trust," said Dr. Tremaine. "For Rachel's sake, if not for yours."

"I believe you."

"Perhaps I can do something to help you, even yet. Tell me everything."

"Listen. It is time I had made a full confession. God help and pity me!"

He was hiding his face with his trembling hands, and did not see the quick shudder that ran over each of his auditors.

"Are you strong enough to tell the story?" interrupted Dr. Tremaine, eagerly. "You must not excite yourself too much. You have passed through a good deal already."

"I can pass through even more. Indeed, I would rather make a clean breast of everything. See, I am strong—quite strong."

He dropped his hands, and turned his pale face upon them, forcing a smile to the bloodless lips.

Dr. Tremaine went up to him, and drew his head down upon his shoulder.

"Rest here, Dick," he said, compassionately. "You need this support. Now go on with what you have to tell me."

"I must begin very far back in my history, Dr. Tremaine, but I do not intend to weary you with a long-drawn-out story."

"Rachel and I can remember nothing of our parents. Even the name we bear may be a borrowed one. As far back as our recollection goes, we lived with one Madame Gale in her cottage, not far from this place."

"Yes, I know her," said Dr. Tremaine.

"Madame did not know anything of our parentage, or at least would tell us nothing. But she was kind to us, in her way, and gave us every advantage."

"The years wore on quietly enough until I was sixteen. Then madame was in trouble of some sort. I could see she did not want me at the cottage any longer. I had a thirst for travel and adventure. At last she yielded to my solicitations, and sent me to India."

"I think now she had, for a long time, been secretly working upon my mind in such a manner that I should readily turn to that far-away quarter of the globe."

"At any rate to India I went. Madame gave me a letter of introduction to one Edward

Lasalle, the same you have known as Edward Dent. Of course I sought him, on arriving in Calcutta.

"He pretended to be a warm friend of mine before I had known him a week—a little too warm to be sincere I thought at the time. He found me a place in a merchant's office where I was soon able to command a good salary."

"Everything went on smoothly enough for a year or two. Then money was missing from the counting-room of my employer. Suspicion pointed me out as the thief, and I was powerless to prove my innocence."

"Of course I was discharged, having barely escaped arrest. Lasalle still clung to me. He got me out of that part of the country, and finally prevailed on me to enlist in the English service."

"I had no taste for military life, and should never have dreamed of it but for Lasalle. He was here my evil genius, as, I am confident, he had been before. Evil reports were soon in circulation concerning me. I think he spread them, though all the while pretending to be my devoted friend."

"There was one man in the regiment who had conceived a special dislike to me. His name was William Flint, but he was generally called Black Billy among our comrades, partly because of his complexion, and partly because he was coarse, brutal, secretive in his nature."

"From the very first, this man seemed bound to quarrel with me. I did not suspect it then, but I know now he was really Lasalle's tool, and only carrying out instructions given him by his employer."

"For months I succeeded in avoiding him. But one fatal morning, when I had been drinking, we met in a coffee-house in the town where we were stationed."

"Black Billy was unusually insulting. One word led to another. Finally he taunted me with being a counting-house thief, a light-fingered scoundrel."

"You can guess what followed. I called the fellow out. We fought—he fell—and, yielding to the impulse of the moment, I fled with the mark of Cain upon my brow."

He paused a moment to wipe the clammy beads from his forehead.

"Good God! how I have suffered since that fatal hour!" he cried out, sharply. "I might better have endured a thousand deaths. One long night of torment has been my portion."

"I sought Lasalle, in my trouble. He stripped the mask from his face, and told me to be gone, he had no fellowship with murderers. He did even more than that. He collected all the proof he could find against me; he hunted me down like a fox. If he learned I had found a covert he cruelly drove me from it."

"Ah, how I learned to loathe that man when I comprehended the double part he had been playing! He had meant to ruin me all the while. I was sure of it. It was at his instigation, I am positive, that the theft was committed."

"What could have been his object in ruining you?" asked Dr. Tremaine.

Dick slowly shook his head.

"I cannot tell. It all seems very strange. And yet I could not help thinking he was all the while working out the will of somebody here."

"Not Madame Gale?"

"No, I scarcely think it was Madame Gale, though she may have been aware of the whole plot. I am sure it was some person of greater influence than madame."

"Why should you think so?"

"I cannot tell you. It was a vague suspicion, confirmed by the fact that Lasalle warned me against returning to my native land. He swore he would have me arrested just so surely as I attempted any such step."

"Did he give any reason for this opposition?"

"None."

"You braved his power, and did return?"

"Ay, at last. I longed to see Rachel. I could keep away no longer, and so ran the risk I did."

"Lasalle, or Edward Dent, as he is called, followed you?"

"Yes. He saw Rachel, and fell in love with her. From that moment his plans must have taken a new turn. He offered her my life and liberty if she would marry him."

"Ah!" cried Dr. Tremaine, between his shut teeth.

A brief silence followed. Rachel was crying softly. She saw how terribly her brother must have suffered, and her heart bled for him. She did not regret anything she had done for him.

At last Dr. Tremaine spoke again.

"We have heard enough of the past," he said.

"Now tell me of that night."

"The night when Lasalle was murdered?" asked Dick, calmly.

"Yes."

He trembled a little. So did Rachel. Both were longing to hear his story of what had happened then, told in his own way. And yet neither one nor the other had dared ask for the particulars before.

Rachel had shrunk from the subject with a horror akin to fear. Seeing this, Dick had spared her all allusion to the subject. Of Dr. Tremaine he had never felt disposed to make a confidant, until this moment.

But now he began to tell the story in a strangely calm, collected way. He spoke of meeting Grace in the garden, and repeated what she had said to him.

"That was my first intimation of Lasalle's purpose to marry Rachel," he went on. "I was angry, desperate. I don't know what I might not have done in the madness of the moment."

"While fleeing wildly through the shrubbery, I heard a pistol-shot close at hand. I sprang into the glade where the murder was committed, and there I saw Lasalle, weltering in his own blood, and a horrible-looking old woman standing over him."

Rachel started up with a suppressed shriek.

"A woman! Oh, Dick, Dick!" and she flung her arms about him, sobbing hysterically. "Then you did not fire the fatal shot?—you did not?"

"I did not," he answered, firmly.

"Thank God!" she screamed; "oh, thank God for that!"

"Why did you suspect me?" he demanded, almost angrily. "Was I not wounded myself? How could that have happened if I had shot him dead at my feet?"

"It might—I thought—you might have received your wound in the first place," she faltered.

"But I did not. The woman struck me with a knife she must have taken from Lasalle's person."

"Oh, yes, yes."

"She turned upon me like a fury, as I ran up. I recognized her at a glance, for she was no stranger to me. There was sufficient light for that purpose. The moon was nearly full, you remember."

"Where had you seen the woman before?" asked Dr. Tremaine.

"In India. Her name is Jane Bell. She was Lasalle's reputed wife, I believe. But that was many years ago—when she was a younger and prettier woman. She loved him, and was desperately jealous of his attentions to other women. She has threatened his life more than once, if he ever dared to marry; she has been little better than a madwoman for several years. Indeed, she was known as Crazy Jane."

"And she killed Lasalle, or Edward Dent, as he called himself?"

"I think so. She must have heard of his contemplated marriage. But I have not the slightest idea how she tracked him to the place."

"As I said, I recognized her instantly. The recognition was mutual. 'Ah,' she screamed, 'you have dogged me here to betray me! You mean to drag me back again. But you shall not!'"

"Then she sprang upon me, and inflicted the wound from which I suffer before I could help myself. I grew suddenly sick and faint, and could only crawl into the shrubbery and hide

myself there. She was still standing beside the dead body when I saw her last."

"She must be found," said Dr. Tremaine.

Rachel did not speak. But she drew Dick's face down to her own, and their lips met in a long, clinging kiss.

"God bless you, my sister," he whispered.

God had blessed her, for the night of her sorrow was over, and in the eastern horizon of her life she saw the promise of a glorious dawning.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONFESSION.

THE next morning Dr. Tremaine began the search for Jane Bell.

It was poor Dick's only chance for life and liberty—the finding of this wretched, forlorn creature. It seemed very hard, but then the innocent must not suffer for the guilty.

It was a wild, wet morning, the rain beating against the casements, the wind howling fearfully among the great trees surrounding the house.

Dr. Tremaine cared little for the inclemency of the weather. With a great cloak buttoned securely about him, he sallied forth, taking a short cut to the glade where the murder had been committed.

He had somewhere read or heard of the singular mania that induces some murderers to haunt the scene of their crime, and had set out with this forlorn hope in his mind.

His brain was busy. He thought over the story Dick had told him the day before, from beginning to end. Strange suspicions came to him as he did so. Was Mrs. Heathcliff mixed up in this affair? If so, to what extent? Was it she who had induced Lasalle to play such a treacherous part to Dick?

He would have given much for the power to solve this mystery. But it was impenetrable. He scarcely knew why he had dreamed of connecting Mrs. Heathcliff with it in any manner, except her eagerness for Dick's arrest, for he could no longer doubt but that she had really been at the window that night when Rachel thought she saw her.

Though his brain was burdened with all this mystery, he walked firmly on, through marsh and mud and mire, the wind wailing in his ears, and the rain splashing all about him on the leaves and grasses.

He reached the glade. A poor, forlorn creature sat crouching underneath the tree in the middle. He caught a glimpse of a dirty, mud-bespattered gown, and straggling gray locks falling over a pair of crooked shoulders, then went softly up and stood beside the pitiful figure.

"My poor woman," he said, gently.

At the sound of his voice she started up wildly and sought to fly. But her limbs refused to support her. She tottered, and fell back moaning into his outstretched arms.

"I know you," she cried, shrilly. "Blood, blood, blood! It has found voice at last, as I knew it would. It rises up from the ground and screams for vengeance. You have heard it, and are come to take me away with you."

She was drenched to the skin; her face ashy pale; her eyes wild and bloodshot. They turned upon Dr. Tremaine with a truly maniacal glare.

"Poor creature," he said, "do not look at me like that. I have no wish to harm you."

"What!" she cried. "You didn't come to hang me! I know better. Isn't it written, 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'? And doesn't it mean, too, a life for a life?"

She laughed at her own cunning, a low, harsh, terrible laugh.

"Yes," he answered. "But it is also written, 'love your enemies.'"

A sudden change swept over her face. She dropped it into her hands, and began rocking her body violently to and fro, for she had released herself from Dr. Tremaine's arms, and was sitting on the damp ground again.

"I told him I would do it," she murmured, as if talking to herself. "I loved him, but I told him I would do it. I should have died myself if another had taken my place and

borne the name that was rightfully mine. And so I killed him. Yes, I killed him!" she cried, in loud, startling tones, lifting her ashy face once more. "He stood yonder, where those daisies are trampled down, and I shot him dead at my feet! I killed him—I killed him! God forgive me—I killed him!"

She flung up her arms wildly, shrieking out the last words in a perfect frenzy.

"Hush," said Dr. Tremaine, soothingly. "You must not excite yourself."

"I killed him," she repeated, over and over again. "It was the only way to make him mine in this world and the next."

"Whom did you kill?"

"I thought you knew. My husband—Edward Lasalle. Ha, ha, ha! The bonny young bride he had chosen must wear widow's weeds before ever she was a wife. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hush," said Dr. Tremaine, speaking sternly, this time. "You shall not talk so."

But she went on wildly raving, in spite of him. For some minutes he sat quite still, listening. Then his mind was suddenly made up.

This poor wretch was dying. She could not live many hours; she was past human justice—beyond the reach of human laws. She should be made to confess her guilt before witnesses, and save poor Dick from an ignominious fate.

He drew off his dripping cloak and wrapped it tenderly about her.

"Remain here a little while," he said. "I am going for help. Then I will take you home with me, and you shall be made nice and warm."

She did not demur. I doubt if she fully understood him; she sat patient and submissive as a child while the cloak was being wrapped about her; in fact she was too helpless to have resisted.

Dr. Tremaine hurried for assistance. Several men returned with him, bringing a sort of litter upon which the poor woman was conveyed to the house, and placed in the very apartment Dick had vacated less than twenty-four hours previously.

She was provided with dry clothing and every possible comfort.

When his duty to the really dying woman was performed, Dr. Tremaine remembered his duty to Dick. He sent for the proper officers that they might hear her dying confession.

The day wore on, and night fell early. In the storm and darkness, Jane Bell's soul went out to meet its Maker.

But she had a few rational moments before she died. She made ample confession, thus clearing Dick of all reproach. Though the murder had been committed in one of her wildest moments of insanity, she remembered all the circumstances perfectly.

Lasalle had threatened her and tried to force her to leave the neighborhood in that manner. Failing in intimidating her, he had drawn a pistol, swearing at her fearfully the while.

This weapon she had managed to snatch from him, and with it had ended his miserable life.

It was the impulse of self-preservation, perhaps, that had induced her to turn upon Dick, when he made his sudden appearance in the glade.

She had fled herself, on hearing footsteps approach a second time, and, since that fatal day, had been lurking in the neighborhood, frequently visiting the scene of the murder.

She made other confessions, such as her intimate knowledge of Lasalle's life had made her acquainted with.

What those confessions were will soon be revealed. Suffice it now to say that they were perfectly satisfactory to Dr. Tremaine.

In the early dawn of the following morning, he sought the jail where Dick was confined. The two held a rapturous meeting, and in less than an hour's time Dick had left those gloomy walls behind, and trod the streets, a free man once again.

His first thought was of Rachel. She had returned to Fairlawn to pass the night.

"Oh, how happy this will make her," he exclaimed, and made haste to tell her the joyous news. Dr. Tremaine accompanied him. There were circumstances that rendered his presence at Fairlawn very desirable.

CHAPTER XXVII.

UNWINDING THE THREADS.

It was a beautiful morning that followed that day and night of storm.

The sweet landscape and bush-green garden were full of beauty and peace and glory—such glory as God ever gives to nature and to man after conflict and wrestling.

Mrs. Heathcliff sat alone in her handsome parlor, brooding darkly over her plans, when the door was flung open, and Madame Gale stood before her.

"Pauline," cried madame, abruptly, with a shrug and a grimace, "there must be an end of all this!"

"All what?" sneered the haughty woman. "You know very well what I mean. That man in yonder jail is Dick Clyde; and you helped to put him there. Nay, don't shake your head, for I know better."

Mrs. Heathcliff drew back, flushing a little. "And so you have heard of that little circumstance?" she said; "and you guessed the prisoner was Dick?"

"Yes," sharply; "but I did not hear the particulars until this morning. You are cruel and vindictive, Pauline. But if you sacrifice that man it shall go hard with you."

"Bah! Have you turned pleader?" "No, I do not plead, I demand his life at your hands."

Mrs. Heathcliff started and bit her lip. "What do you mean by whipping about in this way?" she asked.

"To see justice done those poor children," was the stern reply. "You and I have wronged them enough already. I don't take another step in this nefarious business. Bring about that man's release, and quickly, too, or I disclose everything."

Mrs. Heathcliff retreated a step or two. Her face was horrible to look upon, so much vindictive rage and fury could be seen flashing through it.

"You are jesting," she said, slowly, with a harsh laugh. "You would never be such a fool!"

"I never jest, Pauline."

"You have been faithful to me so many years—you have identified yourself so fully with my cause—"

"True," interrupted Madame Gale, bitterly. "For your sake I have been almost as vile a sinner as yourself. But, all things must have an end. I refuse to be your scapegoat any longer."

She paused, dropped her eyes, and set her teeth together in a determined way that made Mrs. Heathcliff tremble.

At this instant the bell rung sharply, and heavy footsteps crossed the hall. The door was pushed slightly ajar and Dr. Tremaine looked in. Then he turned back for a moment.

"Is Colonel Heathcliff able to leave his room?" the two women heard him ask of the servant.

"Yes, sir," was the answer. "Then ask him to come to the parlor directly. I must see him on matters of the first importance."

The eyes of the two women met. Mrs. Heathcliff changed color.

"What can he want of my husband?" she said, in a sharp whisper.

Madame did not answer. There was a moment's torturing suspense, and then the door opened a second time.

Dr. Tremaine entered. A young man was leaning upon his arm—a tall, handsome young fellow with violet eyes and hair like spun gold, so soft and bright and silken.

Mrs. Heathcliff started at sight of him, stared wildly, and a sharp cry burst from her lips.

"What does this mean?" she demanded, quaking with evident terror.

Dr. Tremaine led Dick to a seat—for of course it was Dick himself who was with him—and saw that he was comfortably established before making any reply.

Then he said coolly: "What has surprised you, Mrs. Heathcliff? I have merely brought in a friend of mine for a morning call."

With an effort of will worthy a better cause the guilty woman brought the color back to her lip and cheek.

"Indeed!" she sneered. "Perhaps you will be good enough to mention the name of your friend?"

"He is commonly known as Dick Clyde."

Mrs. Heathcliff turned in a well-assumed attitude of recoil.

"Good heavens!" she cried. "You are mad, Dr. Tremaine. Why have you brought that murderer here? I thought he was safely lodged in jail."

"Dick is no murderer," said Dr. Tremaine.

Then he was silent. Mrs. Heathcliff's wonderful composure surprised him. He could not help admiring this one attribute of her character. It disposed him to be lenient as possible with her.

While he stood silent and perplexed, revolving the situation in his own mind, there was a rustle outside the room—the door opened and Colonel Heathcliff slowly crossed the threshold.

He was followed by Rachel and Grace. The young ladies had witnessed Dr. Tremaine's arrival with Dick from an upper window.

Rachel rushed forward eagerly, bursting into tears of joy as she flung herself on the floor by her brother's chair.

"Oh, Dick, Dick!" she cried. "You are here—and we! Thank God—thank God!"

Colonel Heathcliff stood breathless, fixed as stone, glaring wildly at the young man.

"That face—that hair—that soft, bright, wonder-

ful hair!" he faltered, pressing both hands over his throbbing temples.

Dr. Tremaine crossed to his side. His resolve was taken. He could not witness the man's emotion unmoved.

"You have seen another face like Dick's—other hair like his?" he queried.

"Yes," was the faint reply. "Whose?"

"The wife of my youth—the dear woman who is now a saint in heaven. Good God, how like—how wonderfully like!"

At this moment Mrs. Heathcliff stepped forward. Her face was ashy white. She trembled from head to foot.

"Come away!" she said, hoarsely, endeavoring to take her husband's hand. "This is no place for you. You are not strong—you must not excite yourself."

"Wait!" cried Dr. Tremaine, in a loud, stern voice. "I have a question to ask before you go. Colonel Heathcliff, did you have children by your first marriage?"

The agitated man bowed his head. "Twins—a boy and a girl?"

"Yes," answered Colonel Heathcliff. "What became of them?"

A convulsive shudder shook his frame. "Theirs was a terrible fate," he said, in a broken, hollow voice. "I was compelled to leave home on business. They were in the charge of an experienced nurse. While I was away the house burned to the ground, and my two precious babes were burned alive!"

A groan burst from his lips as he uttered those last words—a cry of bitter anguish.

Dr. Tremaine's face grew radiant. He caught his breath sharply, once or twice, before he could command himself to speak.

"My friend, my noble friend," he said, at last, "cheer up; I believe your children are alive and well this moment."

"Alive? Alive?" gasped the wondering man, while a wild shriek of dismay and terror broke from Mrs. Heathcliff.

"Yes. They were saved from the fiery death that threatened them. They have lived to grow up, and—*you behold them before you in Dick and Rachel Clyde!*"

A moment's dead silence followed. Slowly the conviction forced itself home upon Colonel Heathcliff's mind that Dr. Tremaine had spoken the truth.

He started, tottered, then rushed wildly forward. "Oh, my children!" he shrieked, and the three were locked in a close embrace.

"My father!" murmured Dick and Rachel, in one breath.

Mrs. Heathcliff leaned forward and fixed her eyes upon them in a stare that had nothing human or lifelike about it. She was ashy white, and a clammy sweat had broken out upon her forehead.

At last she roused herself. The power of volition came back to her trembling limbs, and she tugged wildly at the three figures clasped so closely together.

"It is false!" she shrieked. "It is false, my husband. Come away. You surely will not believe the lies these people are telling you!"

Madame Gale had not spoken. She had stood with a calm, unmoved face throughout the scene.

"It is true!" she said, now, in a low, firm voice. "Pauline, cease to struggle against fate. God is working out His own will. I knew this must all come to pass, sooner or later. I shall own up to everything. You had better do the same."

A shiver ran over Mrs. Heathcliff. She glared into the white, wondering faces she saw all around her. Then with her jeweled hands shaking wildly in the air and a dreadful shiver in her voice, she said:

"Be it so. I confess everything. *I'm a lost, ruined woman!*"

She turned slowly and with difficulty, and left the room. They heard her glide feebly up the stairs, and a door above shut sharply.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE END OF ALL.

MADAME GALE broke the silence that followed Mrs. Heathcliff's sudden departure. Heaving a long-drawn sigh she said:

"Let us end this wretched scene as quickly as possible. I know the truth must be told. Dr. Tremaine, let me help you tell it."

Colonel Heathcliff raised his head, looking at her keenly.

"It is true, then—it is true that these are my children?" he cried, eagerly.

"It is true," she answered.

Then, turning to Dr. Tremaine, she added: "There were only two or three persons in all the world who knew that those babes were saved from the burning building. Who revealed to you the secret?"

"A woman known as Jane Bell. She was the wife of the man who called himself Edward Dent, but whose true name was Lasalle. Of course, she became possessed of a great many of his secrets. She did not know the whole story, but she had learned enough, so that I readily guessed the truth from her account. It could do no harm, at least, to act upon the convictions to which her narrative gave rise."

Madame bobbed her head and made an odd grimace.

"Listen," she said, presently. "I'm going to tell the whole truth. But you must promise not to molest Pauline—Mrs. Heathcliff."

"This is not my affair," answered Dr. Tremaine, gravely. "I may help to right wrongs, but not to punish offenses."

"Pauline must be spared and forgiven. She is my sister."

"Your sister?" echoed Colonel Heathcliff.

"My own sister," answered madame, bobbing and smiling. "I know you are surprised. But it was her wish to keep the relationship a secret. Of course I submitted. There were good reasons why I should do so."

"Pauline knew and loved you, Colonel Heathcliff, when you were unmarried. You married, and she, out of sheer despair, followed your example. Singularly enough, she lost her husband within a month of the time when you buried your wife."

"From that moment she set herself to the task of winning you. It was Lasalle who fired the house and then stole your children from the burning building. He was not hardened enough to kill them. Nor did Pauline wish it—for he was acting under her instructions."

"The children were given into my care. Nobody suspected their existence, and it was an easy matter to keep the secret of their parentage. Pauline had bribed me heavily. Besides, she was poor, and I would have done anything to help her. She hated the children, because of their mother. She wished her own daughter to become the heiress of your wealth."

"Well, you married Pauline, after the lapse of a year or two. She accomplished her object."

"I need not dwell on the events of the years that followed. It was fate that brought you here to Fairlawn—it was fate that threw Rachel in your way—it was fate that brought about the strange circumstances that have been transpiring in our midst."

"Nay," said Dr. Tremaine, in a solemn voice, "not fate, but God."

Rachel clung closely to her new-found father, and whispered:

"I understand now why I was so singularly drawn to you, from the first. Some subtle instinct seemed to tell me that we were not as strangers."

"And you crept into my heart, at once, dear child," said Colonel Heathcliff. "God has been very kind to me; now, I have both my children."

He said not a word of his wife, or the treachery of which she had been guilty. But there was pain mingled with the rapture written upon his countenance.

Grace had witnessed all this scene in a perfect agony of shame and humiliation. She crouched in the furthest corner, hiding from every eye.

At last she rose slowly; she crept up-stairs to her mother's room. Mrs. Heathcliff lay there among the velvet cushions of the couch, one white small hand shading her face.

Grace went up to her.

"Mother," she said, "we have each other. I will never leave you; I can forgive everything. In this hour of humiliation, let us kneel here together, and promise God to mend our wicked lives."

There was no answer. She lifted the jeweled hand; it fell from hers like lead.

Mrs. Heathcliff was dead, and a faint, sweet, sickening odor, that pervaded the room, betrayed the secret of her death.

It requires very few words to chronicle happiness—even such rare peace as had fallen to the lot of these, our sometime friends.

Every trouble has fallen away from sweet Rachel's pathway, and now, with the strong arm of Dr. Tremaine to lean upon, her days glide by, full of placid content, without one shadow to mar the happiness of the future.

Grace, purified by suffering, has developed into a true and noble woman. Under the sin and passion that hurried her so rapidly along the dark road, there was all the while beating a great, strong heart that at last made itself heard.

She soon grew to look upon Dr. Tremaine as a brother. Gradually a new passion sprung up in her heart—deeper, nobler, purer than the first had been.

This new love had Dick for its object; and it was returned. He, too, forgot all bitterness, all animosities, all heart-burnings, and nobly resolved to be happy in each other, despite the sins and wrongs of others.

It was well; it was God's way of healing the troubled waters, and so I say again, it was well.

But I must not forget to tell of a signal good fortune that happened to Dick.

Among the papers found in Lasalle's trunk, at Fairlawn, was a letter of recent date, signed "William Flint."

Dick sent a man to India to make inquiries. It turned out that Black Billy was really alive and well. He had been wounded in the duel, but not fatally. Lasalle had concealed this fact, the better to work upon Dick's fears.

It was a great relief to the young man to know he was not a murderer.

Of Colonel Heathcliff we have only a word to add. He divides his time between his two children, never speaking of the past, but trying to live happy and contented in the present.

Madame Gale still occupies the cottage where we first found her, growing gentler and more human as the years glide onward, bearing her nearer her eternal home.

God's golden promises are even for the sinner that repenteth. Blessed be His name.

THE END.

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